

# INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

## *Editors*

**Prof. (Dr.) Jai Shankar Singh**  
**Dr. Sangeeta Taak**  
**Dr. Kalpeshkumar L Gupta**

## *Associate Editors*

**Dr. Pancham Preet Kaur**  
**Dr. Kasturi Bhagat**





**INTEGRITY**  
EDUCATION INDIA

**INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM**

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ISSN: 9

First Impression - 2026

Published by INTEGRITY EDUCATION INDIA

**New Delhi**

First Floor, 4598/12-B, 1st Floor,  
Padam Chand Marg, Daryaganj,  
New Delhi, Delhi 110002  
Phone: +91 98 11 66 62 16 (M)  
Phone: +91 70 11 60 56 18 (M)

**Bengaluru**

Jallahalli East  
Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.  
Phone: +91 98 11 66 62 16 (M)  
Email: publisher.integrity@gmail.com

**USA**

New Jersey  
14 Grandview Ave, Upper Saddle River,  
NJ-07458, USA  
Phone: +14805226504 (M)

**London**

37 Degree Media  
64, Hodder Drive, Perivale, London UB68LL.  
United Kingdom.  
Phone: +44 7950 78 18 17 (M)  
Website: integrityeducation.co.in

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For any Query / Feedback

Phone: +91 98 11 66 62 16 (Vineet Sharma)

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Printed in India @ New Delhi

# Preface

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*"We owe a lot to India and the Indians, who taught us how to count, without which no worthwhile scientific discovery could have been made!"*

- Albert Einstein

Our beloved country India is having a rich culture for centuries and has contributed to this universe in variety of ways in terms of education, culture, tradition, knowledge etc. Countries from across the continents have learnt and adopted many things and flourish in their own way. But it is sad to see we despite of having rich elements in nature, we have forgotten these all things and started adopting western culture, tradition, knowledge aggressively. There is no harm to learn and adopt from other countries in the era of वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् (the world is one family) but ignoring our roots completely is totally unacceptable. Various NGOs, voluntary organizations have been trying to preserve our rich culture and spreading awareness about the same for decades. It is really encouraging to see recent actions from Government of India side to promote Indian Knowledge System in the country and make it a part of curriculum and activities. It has set up the IKS divisions and conducted many programmes in last couple of years.

In the light of the recent development in India at Ministry level, the Indian Knowledge Systems Division (IKS Division) of the Ministry of Education (MoE) was established in October 2020, with a vision to promote interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on all aspects of IKS, preserve and disseminate a deeper understanding and appreciation of IKS for further research, and societal applications. The IKS Division supports and funds the establishment of IKS centers, and interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research in IKS.

The main objective of the IKS Division is to go beyond merely acknowledging the existence of Indian Knowledge Systems and to rejuvenate and mainstream it by integrating it into the fabric of our education research ecosystem for the contemporary world. It further seeks to bridge the gap between Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems and contemporary knowledge systems. By doing so, the IKS Division aims at cultivating a living tradition that fosters the creation of new knowledge and inspires the development of future innovators and scholars based on Bhāratīya paradigms of knowledge generation and transmission.

Embracing the rich heritage and lineage of Indian Knowledge Systems, the IKS Division aims to uphold and carry forward the wisdom that has been passed down through generations. The goal is to highlight the continuous unbroken knowledge traditions of Bhārata since time immemorial.

Indian knowledge systems offer unique perspectives that make this knowledge system 'Bhāratīya' and hold immense value in addressing contemporary and emerging challenges. By combining traditional wisdom with modern knowledge, we can find holistic solutions that transcend the limitations of either approach.

The IKS Division aims to highlight the practical utility of the Indian Knowledge System to solve current and emerging problems of India and the world. By focusing on areas of societal importance, such as health, technology, and social well-being, IKS projects strive to make a tangible difference to the contemporary world by mainstreaming Indian Knowledge Systems. Looking at the importance and current need of the inclusion of IKS in curriculum and academic activities, we at Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab conducted two editions of Capacity Building Programme on Indian Knowledge System in which 1500+ participants from across country registered in the same. We received overwhelming responses from all participants which motivates us further to plan third edition of the said programme. These capacity building programmes motivated us to initiate the present book project.

We are grateful for his/her Foreword/Message appreciating our contribution to the IKS movement in the country. We are thankful to all the authors/contributors for their thought-provoking articles discussing various aspects of IKS dealing with various subject matter.

We hope this book will become a guiding factor in implementation of Indian Knowledge System in our curriculum and daily life also. Looking forward to have further feedback, inputs on the work.

**Prof. (Dr.) Jai Shankar Singh**  
**Dr. Sangeeta Taak**  
**Dr. Kalpeshkumar L Gupta**

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# Ridging Faith and Science: Ecological Awareness in Jain and Vedic Traditions

**Dr. Malay Patel<sup>1</sup>,**

*Associate Professor,*

*Unitedworld Institute of Design, Karnavati University*

**Aarohi Dave**

*Assistant Professor,*

*Unitedworld Institute of Design, Karnavati University*

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## **Abstract**

*Ecology and environmental science are contemporary branches of scientific inquiry that specifically examine the environment and its constituent elements. Currently, mankind is confronted with substantial problems due to the exhaustion of natural resources and the deterioration of the environment. These issues are inflicting considerable damage to human well-being and the harmonious connection between humans and nature. The Jain tradition of sustainability and ecological consciousness originates from ancient Indian literature such as the Tattvārtha Sūtra and the Ācārāṅga Sūtra. However, in the last decade, there has been a significant increase in documentation about this topic. This traditional corpus of knowledge encompasses enduring concepts and techniques related to the notion of environmental, social, and personal sustainability.*

*The Jain text looks at a number of viewpoints, such as how everything in the universe is interrelated, how people and natural principles are related, how important it is for humans to protect and preserve natural resources, how to avoid producing excessive or needless waste, and how people should generally avoid abusing the environment. These viewpoints are typical of the lives that around ten million people—laypeople and mendicants alike—lead. In a similar vein, Vedic belief—which entails the methodical analysis and application of the Veda and Vedic literature—also makes a strong case for recognizing the interdependence of human life with the natural world. It also advocates for promoting endeavours that safeguard and benefit from nature's conservation. The primary objective of this review article is to bridge the divide between popular science and the faith based spirituality which is rooted in many religions. The goal of this research is to analyse the ancient Indian spiritual beliefs, which had a strong environmental sensitivity, in light of the hopeful signals of ecological awareness. Here Jain texts like Tattvārtha Sūtra and the Ācārāṅga Sūtra, along with Vedic texts Atharvaveda,*

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author

*Rigveda and Yajurveda are reviewed and compared with modern scientific literature on ecology and environment. Ancient literature provides evidence of a thorough comprehension of the detrimental consequences of environmental deterioration, irrespective of whether it is caused By natural factors or human actions. The similar views are also estimated by the modern scientific literature through empirical lenses.*

**keywords:** Jainism, Vedas, Religion, Ecology, Spirituality, Indian Knowledge System, Science

## **1. Introduction**

Ecology is the study of nature that focusses on keeping the ecosystem in balance. The link between vegetarianism and ecology is based on the idea of "live and let live," which means not using the Earth's resources to control nature by killing all living things. Right now, the fight between people and environment has reached a terrible level. Nature and people are at conflict with one other. Chemicals have been made to kill bugs and other pests. Insecticides and pesticides are used on farms, gardens, and forests. Are they biocides or insecticides? Pollution is happening to us right now. We use chemicals that harm the world and pollute the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink. Every year, hundreds of millions of tonnes of chemicals that are harmful to all kinds of life are discharged into the atmosphere of the Earth. As global industrial production has grown, there has been a trend towards more manufacturing waste being released into the biosphere. This is already bad for plants and animals, as well as people's health. We get rid of all types of life. Is there no way to cut? Without collaboration from other countries, it is hard to deal with problems with protecting the environment since pollution in the air and water crosses national borders, no matter how well ecological regulations work in one country. To avoid an oncoming global ecological calamity, it is now very important to protect the biosphere on a national and global level. One of the best ways to protect nature is to prevent nuclear war, as it would seriously harm the environment and kill many people."

Modern scientific efforts are trying to solve serious ecological problems, but it's important to also include religious views on these subjects. The Vedic and Jain traditions in India set down basic rules for living in peace with nature hundreds of years ago. The goal was to bring together spiritual and physical symbiosis by looking at it through the perspective of moral and ethical duties. People in ancient India thought of the universe as a single thing, and they believed that everything that happened in nature came from a divine source. Every step forward was closely tied to the larger path of development.

A lot of work went into finding a good balance between people and the natural environment. Thus, in the context of faith-centric perspective this comparative

research paper is set. This research as stated in abstract aims to facilitate a dialogue between modern scientific comprehension and the spiritual perspectives inherent in India's religious traditions. It examines the ways in which ancient Indian philosophies expressed ecological awareness prior to the development of contemporary environmental science. The study juxtaposes historical traditions with contemporary ecological science, revealing substantial convergences, emphasising points of difference, and pinpointing novel opportunities to enhance modern sustainability discourse. The present paper is structured into five sections. In section 2, conceptual premise: Science v/s Spirituality is discussed along with the relevant methodology used in this paper. In section 3, existing literature on Jain canonical text and Vedic literature is reviewed and compared with current ecological problems through scientific viewpoints. In section 4, limitation and implications of the study is discussed elaborately. Section 5 comprises of the conclusions and inferences drawn out from this research emphasizing unique contributions of this paper.

## **2. Conceptual Premise: Science v/s Spirituality**

First of all, the link between science and spirituality is perplexing since their claims refer to two separate realms of reality. Science claims, as is widely known, to grasp the empirical, outside world knowledge. It tries to provide the external world event a causal explanation. The obtained knowledge of the outer world via science is supposed to be observable and unbiased. Against this, the claim of spirituality is connected to an alleged transcendent realm existing outside of the material, empirical universe. Not the causal or any other explanation of the "Ultimate Reality," but spiritual knowledge, establishes its existence. With the variety of claims spiritual masters make on the nature of ultimate reality, one can hardly claim that spiritual knowledge is objective or universal. Moreover, the spiritual masters themselves would emphasize that the spiritual knowledge cannot be verified scientifically.

While most spiritual/religious traditions may differ on many ceremonial elements and their approach towards global and other earthly concerns, at the same time different theological orientations can be pragmatically utilized to save the Earth. Certain religious traditions, for instance, Hindu and others, view the person as either a microcosm of the macrocosm or as part of the whole. Their religious ritual therefore incorporates elements of the entire ecology, including rivers, mountains, trees, flowers, holy groves, hallowed land, etc. From the other side, Christian values environmental justice and compassion. Using "Hadith," of the prophet Muslim environmentalist describes the Earth as a mosque, so rendering the entire globe holy. Buddhist spiritual aim is complete awareness of mutual cause and interconnectedness. But in Jainism, the ultimate aim of the faith is the Ahimsa, or non-injury to living entities and the Earth.

The fundamental motive and logic of the faith-based approach to environmental preservation set it apart from the scientific point of view viewing nature as holy and handed to mankind by a higher authority, religious beliefs can describe environmental stewardship as a moral or spiritual obligation. From this vantage point, ethical stewardship, divine will, and spiritual harmony take front stage. Focusing on quantifiable effects such climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, the scientific method is based on empirical facts, ecological principles, and rational analysis. Science focuses on observation, experimentation, and logical thinking whereas religion depends on faith, scriptures, and moral lessons. Despite these variations, both points of view may work together to inspire a common dedication to environmental preservation.

Now, conceptually how Jainism and Vedic literature address ecological issues. Jainism fundamentally, addresses environmental issues by abiding to extreme non-violence and having non-interventionist mind-set. While, Vedic literature conserves environment through Rta (cosmic order) and Dharma, which promotes harmonious coexistence with nature via rituals and worship.

In the original scriptures of both Jainism and in Vedic literature one can find my verses and narratives which supports ecological conservation and reverence.

### **Methodology**

This review paper is based on secondary data that was gathered from a variety of sources, including original scriptures, books, articles, websites, and journals. Based on these literature we have equated the oriental narrations and summarized in form of few excerpts. After selecting these few excerpts we have tried to interpret the same narration through scientific viewpoints. Here Hermeneutic analysis is used as core method to analyse deep interpretation of ancient texts.

Hermeneutic analysis facilitates a profound interpretation of ancient texts by placing them within their philosophical and cultural contexts. This method reveals the meanings, values, and intentions inherent in their historical context, facilitating a more nuanced and genuine interpretation rather than viewing these works in isolation.

In this paper, we have just selected Jainism and Vedic canonical texts, with limited textual reference. However, it can be certainly extended to other faiths and belief system.

### **3. Few excerpts from canonical texts: Jainism & Vedic Philosophies Jain literature**

In Jainism, the principle of Ahimsa, articulated in the Ācāranga Sūtra, encompasses non-violence towards all life forms, including air, water, and microorganisms. This indicates a foundational ecological ethic focused on harm

reduction and biodiversity preservation (Dundas, 2002; Chapple,2002). Few excerpts from Jainism are given below:

परिसुद्धजग्गहणं दारुय-धान्नाइयाण तहचेव ।

गहियाण वि परिभोगो विहीइ तसरक्खणदटाए ॥259॥”

- *Savayapannati*

**Translation:**

*“In practicing non-violence, one must meticulously and consciously choose water, wood, and consumables that are pure, clean, and free from contamination by living organisms such as ants and insects. Consequently, all of these environmental factors should be “uncontaminated”.*

**Interpretation:**

Based on nonviolence principles, Jain philosophy's approach to ecology and the environment is to protect natural ecosystems by making meticulous efforts to avoid crossing paths with nature, because doing so, will result in pollution, which may have negative consequences for your own existence in long run which can be validated through recent scientific findings as well.

मनोज्ञामनोज्ञेन्द्रियविषयरागद्वेषवर्जनानि पंच॥7/8॥”

- *Tatvarth Sutra*

**Translation:**

*“The vow of non-consumerism necessitates the abandonment of attachment to pleasurable and aversive stimuli related to the five senses.”*

**Interpretation**

Non-consumerism lessens waste, pollution, and resource exploitation, therefore improving the sustainability of the world. Cutting consumption helps to lower mass production and transportation carbon emissions as well as deforestation and water depletion. Promote recycling, reuse, and repair to help to reduce landfill overflow and plastic waste. Conservation of energy is good as reduced demand for manufactured goods lowers the consumption of fossil fuels. Ethical buying decisions encourage fair-trade and sustainable goods therefore benefiting the surroundings. Inspired by Jainism's Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) and Vedic Dharma, non-consumerism promotes environmental harmony and sensible use of

resources for next generations. Thus it fosters judicious use of resources and promotes conscious consumerism

“क्षेत्रवास्तु हिरण्यसुवर्णधनधान्य दासीदास कूप्यप्रमाणातिक्रमाः ॥ 17 / 28 ॥”

- *Tatvarth Sutra*

### Translation

*"Not to limit area of agriculture etc., number of houses, gold, silver and currency of food grains, servants, clothes, utensils are transgressions of vow of Non-consumerism."*

### Interpretation

In, this line the text narrates that one should limit his or her consumption and take vow to restrict their consumption, because too much consumption destroys ecosystems, depletes resources, and disturbs nature. Mining, overfishing, and deforestation all destroy ecosystems and threaten species. Consumption of fossil fuels and waste pollution aggravate environmental harm and change of climate. Implementing sustainable practices, minimizing waste, and preserving energy are very vital if we are to prevent future damage. The earth has to be preserved for next generations via responsible consumption.

“सति पाणा पुढी-गिस्सिया, तण-गिस्सिया, पत्त-गिस्सिया,  
कद्द-गिस्सिया, गामेय-गिस्सिया, कययर-गिस्सिया ॥ 11 / 4 / 82 ॥”

- *Acharang Sutra*

### Translation

*"Living beings depend on earth-forms (soil, minerals), grasses, leaves, wood, cow dung, various types of waste."*

### Interpretation

In, this line the text narrates Earth, grass, leaves, and minerals are all vitally crucial to human existence. Plants receive sustenance from soil, grass binds the earth together, leaves offer us oxygen, and chemicals keep our bodies healthy. Each

element of a subtle, crucial chain aids the others. If you ignore just one aspect of the system, like bad soil, plants that vanish, or minerals that run out, the entire thing begins to break apart. This hurts the planet, but it also puts people's lives in danger. We are not separate from nature; it is a part of us. We can't see this balance, yet it's vital for our health, food, air, and even our peace of mind. Contemporary ecology, the same is true: the ground, plants, air, water, and rocks are all interrelated and rely on each other. You can't change one element without changing the entire thing. The message is always the same, no matter who says it: we can only remain alive if we live in harmony with nature.

### **Key Learning's from Jain texts on Ecology**

Jainism's profound and valuable principles and beliefs may protect the environment. Jain thinkers believed violence, avarice, and overconsumption caused environmental degradation. They created full behaviour standards to maintain the planet calm, healthy, and harmonious. Non-violence (Ahimsa), truth (Satya), non-stealing (Asteya), non-possession (Aparigraha), and celibacy (Brahmacharya) demonstrate how this system works for householders and ascetics. Basic ahimsa applies to all living beings, not just humans. It promotes compassion and minimises harm to animals, plants, and bacteria. Aparigraha advocates for less goods to safeguard natural resources.

The Jain code of conduct is well-planned, eco-friendly, and durable. Although many Jain writings have been destroyed, the remaining literature provides a vast, extensive reference on environmental ethics. If individuals follow these guidelines, they can halt environmental harm and restore ecological balance and purity.

### **A comparative explorations of ecological ethics: Jain and Vedic literature**

The Jain code of conduct and Vedic literature both talk about a way of thinking about the environment that is based on spiritual awareness and taking care of the environment. The Jain tradition offers a well-thought-out, eco-friendly, and long-lasting moral code that stresses non-violence, self-control, and purity as ways to stop environmental damage and bring things back into balance. This attitude is quite similar to the one found in Vedic literature, where nature is seen as holy and interrelated. The Vedas describe the Earth and natural elements as divine beings whose well-being is essential to maintaining cosmic harmony. Together, these traditions Jain as well as Vedic traditions present a spiritually grounded framework in which environmental care is both an ethical duty and a means of sustaining cosmic and ecological stability. Here we have explored Vedic literature more closely.

### **Vedic Literature**

Vedic literature, including the Atharva Veda, presents nature as sacred, with elements such as earth (Prithvi), rivers, and wind being venerated as deities. Verses such as Atharva Veda (12.1.12) characterise Earth as a maternal entity deserving

protection, reflecting a perspective in which ecological balance is essential to the cosmic order ( **Rta** )<sup>2</sup>(Tiwari, 1987; Panikkar, 1998). These traditions provide a spiritually grounded framework for environmental ethics that is pertinent to current ecological issues. Similarly, all four Vedas—Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva—recognize the need of maintaining the cyclical character of the seasons, which can be disturbed by climate change arising from inappropriate human activity. It is interesting to note that Vedic people saw the surroundings holistically, respected every element and creature by careful preservation

Now, we can one by one dissect few excerpts from Vedic literature

अश्वत्थो देवसदनस्तृतीयस्यामितो दिवि ।  
तत्रामृतस्य चक्षणं देवाः कुष्ठमवन्वत ॥

-Atharvaveda

### Translation

*“It is prohibited to cut Vat Vriksha as Gods live in this tree and you get no disease where this tree is planted.”*

### Interpretation

Peepal and Banyan trees have been protected for centuries by connecting them to gods. Ancient people worshipped these trees and associated them with gods and spirituality. Because of this, society and religion frowned against chopping trees down for personal or professional purposes. This regard was early environmental protection based on cultural beliefs, not legislation.

Modern science confirms ancient knowledge. Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) and Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) trees are eco-friendly. They are excellent at absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen, cleaning and balancing the atmosphere. These trees exchange gases at night, unlike other plants. These oxygen-emitting trees may be comfortably rested or slept beneath at night. This fits with traditional and current ecological principles. Traditional regard for Peepal and Banyan trees indicates spiritual importance and an intuitive grasp of environmental protection. Cultural spirituality and environmental sustainability.

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<sup>2</sup> **Rta** in Vedic literature means the **cosmic order** or **natural law** that maintains harmony in the universe. It represents the balance of nature, truth, and moral duty.

मधु वाता ऋतायते मधुक्षरन्ति सिन्धवः । माध्वीर्नः सन्त्वोषधीः ॥  
मधु नक्तमुतोषसो मधुमत पार्थिवं रजः । मधु दयौरस्तु नः पिता ॥  
मधुमान नो वनस्पतिर्मधुमानस्तु सूर्यः । माध्वीर्गावो भवन्तु नः ॥  
शं नो मित्रः शं वरुणः शं नो भवत्वयमा ।  
शं न इन्द्रो बृहस्पतिः शं नो विष्णुरुक्रमः ॥

**-Rigveda**

### **Translation**

*“The winds waft sweets, the rivers pour for the man who keeps, the law, and so may the plants be sweet for us. Sweet be the night, sweet be the dawn, sweet the terrestrial atmosphere and sweet be our father heaven to us. May the tall tree be full of sweets for us and full of sweets be the sun, may our milch-kine (Milk giving cows) be sweet for us. Be Friendly (Mitra) gracious unto us, Varuna (Air God) and Aryaman too, Indra, Brihaspati be kind and Vishnu of the mighty stride.”*

### **Interpretation**

This Rigveda shloka teaches us a lot about the environment by showing how nature is a divine and helpful power that helps those who live in a good way. It shows a picture in which everything—the wind, rivers, plants, trees, cows, the sun, and even night and dawn—are described as "sweet," which means that they are peaceful and help life. The text stresses the link between ecological balance and living a moral life (Ṛta), suggesting that people who preserve cosmic order would be rewarded with natural wealth. The sacredness of woods, rivers, and cows stops people from using them and encourages people to protect them by showing respect. Calling on gods like Mitra, Varuna, and Vishnu deepens the link between divine favour and the health of the environment. This shows how important it is to respect and appreciate nature. This old song has a holistic view that incorporates ecology, morality, and spirituality. It reminds us that protecting the environment is both a holy duty and a way to achieve societal harmony and survival.

“ॐ द्यौः शान्तिः अन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथ्वी शान्तिः आपः शान्तिः ओषधयः शान्तिः ।  
वनस्पतयः शान्तिः विश्वे देवा शान्तिः ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ॥”

**-Yajurveda**

## Translation

*“May there be peace in the heavens, peace in the atmosphere, peace on the earth, peace in the waters, peace in the plants, peace in the trees. May all the gods bring peace, and may Brahman (the Absolute) bring peace. May there be peace in all. May that peace come to me.”*

## Interpretation

This verses from the Yajurveda demonstrates that ancient ecological knowledge sees the cosmos as a living whole where every element—sky, air, soil, water, herbs, trees, and even cosmic forces—needs to be in peace and balance for genuine harmony. It makes the point that human health is linked to the health of nature and that environmental balance is not only a material need but also a spiritual one. The passage teaches that mankind can only find enduring peace and happiness when the natural world is respected and preserved in balance. It does this by calling for peace in every part of life.

**“इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणम् अग्निम् आहुः  
स एव एकः सुर्यो देवः ।  
अथो दिव्या अर्थ एकं  
वेदान्तं विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ॥”**

- *Samveda*

## Translation

“They call Him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni; He is the one radiant Sun, the God. The wise speak of the One Reality in many ways, referring to the same Divine found in all of nature.”

## Interpretation

This shloka gives a strong religious reason for being conscious of the environment in the Vedic tradition. Recognising different natural gods like Indra (rain), Agni (fire), Varuna (cosmic rivers), and Mitra (friendship and harmony) as manifestations of a same divine essence encourages a respectful view of the world around us. The Sun is both a physical source of life and a symbol of spiritual light. The passage suggests that nature is not apart from the divine, but rather an active expression of it. This understanding leads to a deep understanding of environmental ethics, which sees harming the natural world as a spiritual crime. In the present ecological catastrophe, ancient wisdom is still relevant. This shows that the quest for sustainability includes not just politics and science but also restoring a spiritual respect for all living things.

## **Key Learning's from Vedic texts on Ecology**

Vedic ideas make people particularly conscious of the need to maintain the environment by displaying nature as sacred. This gives people a deep regard for the environment and a moral obligation to conserve it. In the Vedic conception, the Earth and its parts were not only tools; they were also celestial creatures who deserved respect and care. People believed that harming the environment or using natural resources for personal gain was bad because it disrupted the equilibrium that was necessary for everyone's health and happiness. The Vedas say that all living things are connected to the five main elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. If any of these things don't line up, the natural equilibrium is thrown off, and the planet becomes unstable. So, taking care of the environment isn't simply a problem now; it was a big one in Vedic civilisation as well. The Vedic seers knew that God existed in nature, therefore it is both a moral and spiritual obligation to care about the environment. The Vedas are not only religious books; they also offer a lot of scientific, psychological, and biological information that reveals how humans have always been related to nature.

## **Limitation of the study**

The reliance on chosen and interpretive scripture passages challenges studies of ecological awareness in ancient Indian literature, particularly in Jain and Vedic texts. These works were primarily meant to teach spiritual, ceremonial, and philosophical values, rather than particular environmental aims. As a result, adopting certain hymns or verses to address contemporary environmental issues may lead to misconceptions or too broad conclusions. While concepts like *ahimsa* (nonviolence), respect for nature, and cosmic harmony are consistent with contemporary environmental ethics, they are rooted in religious and philosophical frameworks rather than scientific or policy-based thinking. Furthermore, the metaphorical and poetic nature of these works may limit their direct applicability to current environmental issues. As a consequence, although these historical sources give important ethical insights, they should be examined alongside contemporary environmental research and assessed in their original cultural and theological contexts.

## **Implications of the Study**

In both the ancient Jain text as well as Vedic literature, importance of environmental conservation is highlighted. The goal of both spiritual traditions is to gain an understanding of the "Reality," which is something that science likewise seeks to disseminate through the appropriate means. Therefore, the kind of solutions and remedies that science and technology provides for our ecological challenges in the present day can be extracted from our ancient Indian literature, which contains comparable perspectives and commentaries related to these issues. It is the logical and reasonable endeavours of human beings that have led to the development of science, while the transcendent nature of human being is the

source of spirituality. Therefore, In spite of the fact that the two realms i.e. science and spirituality may appear to be distinguished from one another, they are not entirely distinct from one another since they are the product of human labor. Thus, the scientific and spiritual aspects are two sides of the same coin, representing the perspectives of those who grasp the significance and practicality of both.

## Conclusion

The ancient Indian approach to ecology in Jainism and Vedic literature was comprehensive and deeply integrated into the fabric of the country's culture and religion. Bringing these ancient text narratives and interpreting it in modern context, we are trying to argue that ancient initiatives on environment preservation were deeply engrained in religious scriptures and ritualistic practices. These initiatives demonstrate a deep understanding of ecological equilibrium, including the preservation of sacred forests and the implementation of legislative measures to save wildlife. By reviving ancient customs, we may create a future where humans and the environment thrive in harmony, drawing on the wisdom of the past for guidance. Given the current environmental disasters, the ancient Indian concept of respecting and valuing nature has the potential to be a model for creating more sustainable governing systems globally.

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### **Brief Biography**

**Dr. Malay Patel** is an Associate Professor of Management at the Unitedworld Institute of Design, Karnavati University, in Gandhinagar. He is currently enrolled in a second PhD program at the University of Warsaw, with an emphasis on oriental studies. Dr. Patel has a doctorate in business studies from Sardar Patel University, an M.Sc. in Paints and Polymer Sciences, and an MBA with a focus on marketing and human resources. He has previously held academic posts at IIM Ahmedabad, IIM Indore, and Auro University, as well as corporate experience at Akzo-Nobel N.V. Dr. Patel specializes in strategy, entrepreneurship, and innovation, and he has authored multiple publications in national and international journals.

**Mobile No:** +918347070314

**E-mail:** [academia.malayrpatel@gmail.com](mailto:academia.malayrpatel@gmail.com)

**Ms. Aarohi Dave** is presently serving as an Assistant Professor at Unitedworld Institute of Design, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, with a focus on French Language and Management. She possesses a B2 certification in French and an MBA in Finance, along with teaching experience at institutions such as National Forensic Science University and Alliance Française. Renowned for her captivating and approachable techniques, she fosters an innate curiosity in education. A certified Yoga Prana Vidya (YPV) healer, she provides meditation sessions that enhance spiritual wellness and foster holistic student development.

**E-mail:** [aarohidave@gmail.com](mailto:aarohidave@gmail.com)

## 2.

# Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems in Governance: Pathways to Sustainable and Inclusive Development

M R Ramesh

Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research,

Kalpakkam-603102, Tamilnadu

Email: [gascramesh@gmail.com](mailto:gascramesh@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses an extensive body of indigenous, philosophical, ethical, administrative, and scientific wisdom developed over millennia. Rooted in the civilizational principles of dharma (righteous duty), nyaya (justice), and community-centric governance, IKS offers enduring frameworks for sustainable and inclusive administration. This chapter examines how these knowledge traditions can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary governance to address present-day challenges of decentralization, transparency, environmental stewardship, participatory democracy, and digital inclusion.*

*Drawing on classical sources such as Kautilya's Arthashastra, the Dharmashastras, and indigenous local governance traditions like Panchayati Raj, the chapter situates IKS within a theoretical and ethical foundation. It analyzes ancient urban planning, environmental management systems, community-led dispute resolution mechanisms, and gender-inclusive leadership models, demonstrating their continued relevance to 21st-century governance. Case studies from tribal and rural India illustrate successful examples of self-governance, sustainable resource management, and consensus-based decision-making.*

*The discussion further explores the intersection of IKS and emerging technologies, showing how digital governance tools can scale traditional practices while ensuring transparency and community participation. The chapter also addresses challenges in institutionalizing IKS within modern bureaucracies, including standardization of diverse practices and policy alignment. It proposes a multi-level policy framework that integrates IKS into governance training, curriculum development under NEP 2020, and sustainability audits for local bodies.*

*By synthesizing historical insight, cultural sustainability, and policy innovation, the chapter argues for a decolonized, culturally grounded governance model that strengthens administrative resilience. The integration of IKS offers not only a pathway for India's sustainable development but also a model for global discourse on culturally informed governance.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Governance, Sustainable Development, Panchayati Raj, Arthashastra, Decolonization, Cultural Sustainability, Policy Innovation.*

## 1. Introduction: Rediscovering Indian Knowledge Systems in Governance

Governance in India has historically transcended the narrow confines of bureaucratic administration. Rooted in millennia-old traditions, Indian governance frameworks combined ethical norms, social consensus, environmental stewardship, and cultural continuity. The *sabhas* (assemblies) and *samitis* (councils) of the Vedic era functioned as deliberative bodies, enabling participatory decision-making and consensus-building (Sharma, 2004). These were not merely political organs but also custodians of *dharma*—the moral order ensuring justice, equity, and sustainability.

The continuity of these traditions is visible in the *panchayat* systems of rural India, which embody localized, community-driven governance. Panchayats historically managed resources such as water tanks, grazing lands, and forests while also resolving disputes based on customary law (Sivaramakrishnan, 2011). Such models fostered social cohesion and empowered communities, offering lessons for modern governance.

### 1.1 Contemporary Governance Discourse and Its Resonance with IKS

In modern public administration, the emphasis on transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen engagement aligns closely with the principles embedded in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). For instance, participatory budgeting in municipalities parallels ancient practices of resource allocation through village assemblies. Similarly, today’s sustainability frameworks echo traditional approaches to resource management, where ecological limits were respected, and intergenerational equity was prioritized.

Table 1 below highlights parallels between **core governance principles** in IKS and **modern governance objectives**.

**Table 1: Parallels between IKS Principles and Modern Governance Goals**

IKS Governance Principle	Historical Application	Modern Governance Goal
Dharma (moral responsibility)	King as custodian of justice and welfare	Ethical leadership, integrity in public office
Consensus-based decision	Village assemblies deciding resource use	Participatory governance, citizen engagement
Local resource management	Community-led irrigation systems ( <i>Kudimaramathu</i> )	Decentralized planning, sustainable resource management
Transparency & accountability	Public audits and open assemblies ( <i>sabhas</i> )	Right to Information (RTI), open government frameworks

Equity & inclusion	Protection of marginalized through <i>nyaya</i>	Social justice policies, affirmative action
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## 1.2 Why Rediscover IKS Now?

The rediscovery of IKS is not driven by nostalgia but by the pressing realities of the 21st century. India faces governance challenges such as environmental degradation, rural–urban disparities, declining trust in institutions, and an increasing disconnect between policy design and grassroots needs (Mukherjee & Chakraborty, 2017).

**IKS offers solutions that are context-specific, culturally resonant, and environmentally sustainable. For example:**

- Traditional water management techniques, such as *johads* in Rajasthan, address water scarcity while fostering community participation.
- Sacred groves (*devrai* in Maharashtra, *kaavu* in Kerala) illustrate biodiversity conservation without centralized enforcement.
- Customary dispute resolution in tribal areas reduces judicial burdens and promotes restorative justice.

## 1.3 Opportunities in the Digital Era

The integration of IKS into governance can be greatly amplified by digital tools. Platforms for e-governance, GIS-based mapping of traditional resources, and blockchain-based land records can enhance transparency while preserving local knowledge systems (Mehrotra, 2020). For instance, digitizing *panchayat* proceedings can combine age-old deliberative practices with real-time public accountability.

This hybrid model—where tradition meets technology—can help India meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a culturally grounded way.

## 1.4 The Road Ahead

As India aspires to become a knowledge economy, governance must reflect not just technical efficiency but also **cultural legitimacy**. The integration of IKS into public administration requires:

- **Policy alignment** – embedding IKS principles into planning frameworks.
- **Capacity building** – training civil servants in IKS-informed governance approaches.
- **Community engagement** – empowering local bodies to revive and adapt traditional governance practices.

By weaving together ancient wisdom and modern innovations, India can design governance models that are not only **inclusive and participatory** but also resilient in the face of ecological and socio-political challenges.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations: Dharma, Nyaya, and the Ethics of Governance in Ancient India

Ancient Indian political philosophy viewed governance not as a mere exercise of power, but as a sacred duty grounded in moral responsibility, social harmony, and economic well-being. The guiding principles of *dharma* (righteous duty), *nyaya* (justice), and *artha* (material prosperity) form the conceptual triad underpinning statecraft in classical Indian thought. These concepts are embedded in foundational texts such as the *Dharmashastras*, *Upanishads*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and political treatises like *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. Together, they articulate a vision of governance where moral integrity and societal welfare are inseparable from political authority.

### 2.1 Dharma: The Moral Compass of Governance

In the Indian civilizational context, *dharma* transcends the narrow meaning of “law” and signifies the moral and ethical obligations that sustain social order and cosmic balance (*rita*). For rulers, *raja dharma* specifically referred to duties that ensured justice, protection of citizens, and promotion of collective prosperity (Bühler, 1886; Kane, 1962). Governance rooted in *dharma* mandated that administrative decisions be aligned with ethical values, truthfulness, and the protection of both human and ecological communities.

The *Manusmriti* (7.35–7.36) outlines that a king must prioritize the welfare of his subjects, act without selfish motives, and uphold virtue over expedience. This principle parallels modern frameworks of **ethical governance**, **integrity systems**, and **public accountability mechanisms**. Leaders were not only expected to avoid corruption but also to act as moral exemplars for society.

### 2.2 Nyaya: The Pursuit of Justice

*Nyaya* in governance goes beyond judicial procedure—it embodies the philosophical commitment to fairness, equality, and corrective action for societal wrongs. Ancient jurisprudence, as articulated by philosophers like Gautama in the *Nyaya Sutras*, emphasized that justice must be both **distributive** (ensuring equitable allocation of resources) and **corrective** (rectifying wrongs done to individuals or groups).

In practice, justice was dispensed through a multi-tiered system involving village councils (*panchayats*), district assemblies, and royal courts. The king, as the supreme authority, was bound by *dharma* to administer justice impartially, regardless of caste, wealth, or influence (Rangarajan, 1992). The *Mahabharata* (Shanti Parva, 88.15) states that “the king who rules without partiality, without hatred, and without self-interest is the protector of *nyaya*.”

This commitment to justice is mirrored in contemporary principles of the **rule of law**, **human rights frameworks**, and **judicial independence**. In both contexts, the legitimacy of governance rests upon public trust in fair and equitable legal processes.

### 2.3 Artha: Material Prosperity within Ethical Bounds

*Artha*, one of the four *purusharthas* (human aims), refers to the pursuit of wealth, resources, and material well-being. However, classical Indian thought insisted that *artha* must operate within the ethical boundaries of *dharma*. As Kautilya (Rangarajan, 1992) notes in the *Arthashastra*, economic prosperity is essential for state stability, but it must be achieved without exploitation, environmental degradation, or moral compromise.

The state was expected to invest in infrastructure, agriculture, trade, and public works while ensuring the equitable distribution of wealth. Fiscal prudence, transparency in taxation, and the prevention of monopolistic practices were emphasized to maintain social harmony. This principle resonates with modern concepts of **sustainable economic planning** and **inclusive growth strategies**.

### 2.4 Interrelationship of Dharma, Nyaya, and Artha

The genius of the ancient Indian governance model lies in its integrated view of these three principles. *Dharma* provided the ethical framework, *nyaya* operationalized justice within that framework, and *artha* supplied the material means to sustain both. A deviation in any one of these areas was believed to disrupt the balance of governance, leading to societal unrest.

**Table 2 illustrates the alignment between ancient principles and modern governance equivalents:**

**Table 2: Principles and Modern governance**

Principle	Administrative Implication	Modern Equivalent
Dharma	Moral accountability of rulers	Ethical governance, integrity frameworks
Nyaya	Equitable justice	Rule of law, human rights
Artha	Economic development within ethics	Sustainable economic planning

### 2.5 Ethical Checks on Political Authority

In addition to these guiding principles, ancient Indian governance incorporated institutional checks on rulers to prevent misuse of power. The *sabhas* (assemblies) and *samitis* (councils) functioned as advisory bodies, often including scholars, elders, and representatives of guilds. The king was bound to consult these bodies before making significant decisions, ensuring participatory governance.

Furthermore, the concept of *dandaneeti* (science of punishment) in the *Arthashastra* insisted that punishments be proportionate, transparent, and aimed at reform rather than vengeance. This aligns with modern restorative justice models.

## 2.6 Ecological and Social Dimensions of Governance Ethics

Ancient Indian rulers recognized that governance extended beyond human society to encompass the natural world. Texts such as the *Atharvaveda* and *Arthashastra* contain references to forest conservation, water management, and sustainable agriculture. The ruler's duty (*dharma*) included protecting biodiversity and maintaining ecological balance—a principle that resonates with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on environmental protection.

Social inclusivity was also an ethical imperative. While caste hierarchies were a reality, many administrative texts acknowledge the duty of the ruler to protect marginalized communities, widows, orphans, and the poor. This reflects an early awareness of social justice and equity.

## 2.7 Relevance to Contemporary Governance

The triad of *dharma*, *nyaya*, and *artha* offers valuable insights for contemporary governance in India and beyond:

- **Ethics in Public Office:** Leaders should be evaluated not just on performance metrics but also on ethical conduct and public trust.
- **Justice Delivery Systems:** Legal reforms should focus on accessibility, impartiality, and restorative approaches.
- **Sustainable Development:** Economic growth strategies must integrate environmental safeguards and social equity.

By reinterpreting these principles in a modern context, policymakers can create governance models that are both culturally rooted and globally relevant.

## 2.8 Challenges in Application

While the philosophical underpinnings are rich, direct transplantation of ancient models into contemporary systems is not without challenges. The socio-political context has evolved, requiring adaptation rather than replication. The pluralism of modern India, with its democratic institutions and constitutional framework, demands that IKS principles be integrated in ways that respect diversity, human rights, and scientific rationality.

Moreover, there is a need for empirical research to assess how these philosophical ideals can be operationalized through concrete policy measures, institutional reforms, and civic education.

## 3. Kautilya's Arthashastra and its Contemporary Relevance in Public Administration

*Kautilya's Arthashastra*, composed around the 3rd century BCE, is one of the most comprehensive treatises on governance, administration, and statecraft in ancient India. Written by Vishnugupta, also known as Chanakya or Kautilya, it systematically details political strategies, administrative structures, fiscal management, economic policies, diplomacy, military strategy, and welfare measures. More than a political manual, it is a sophisticated blueprint for

maintaining order, prosperity, and security while ensuring the ruler’s legitimacy through adherence to *dharma* (righteous duty).

Despite being over two millennia old, the *Arthashastra* provides timeless governance principles that resonate in the context of contemporary public administration. Its insights on decentralization, economic prudence, public welfare, and accountability can be adapted to modern governance challenges such as bureaucratic efficiency, anti-corruption measures, disaster management, and sustainable development.

### 3.1 Decentralized Administration: Governance at Multiple Levels

One of Kautilya’s most notable contributions was the emphasis on a **multi-tiered administrative structure**. He advocated for delegation of authority to capable local officials, ensuring that governance remained responsive and efficient at the grassroots level. This model distributed power across central, provincial, and local levels, with each tier accountable for specific functions (Kangle, 1965).

**In contemporary public administration, this approach is echoed in:**

- **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** in rural governance.
- **Urban local bodies** managing city-level administration.
- **Devolution of funds and functions** to state and local governments.

**Table 3: Administrative Structure – Arthashastra vs. Modern Governance**

Level of Administration	Arthashastra Role	Modern Equivalent
Central	King, Prime Minister, Central Ministers	Union Government (PM, Cabinet Ministers)
Provincial	Governors, Provincial Councils	State Governments (Chief Minister, State Ministers)
Local	Village Headman, Community Councils	Panchayats, Municipal Corporations

Kautilya’s decentralization ensured efficient communication, quick decision-making, and reduced administrative overload at the central level—a concept central to modern **good governance**.

### 3.2 Economic Prudence: Resource Optimization

Kautilya considered economic stability the foundation of a strong state. His *Arthashastra* contains detailed chapters on taxation, trade regulation, state monopolies, and agricultural management (Rangarajan, 1992).

**He recommended:**

- Rational tax rates to avoid overburdening citizens.
- State oversight in strategic industries.
- Investment in agriculture as a priority sector.

- Avoidance of fiscal waste through regular audits.

These principles align with modern fiscal responsibility laws, prudent budgeting, and sustainable resource allocation.

**For example:**

- **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** represents a streamlined taxation approach akin to Kautilya's desire for uniform tax systems.
- **Public Finance Management Systems (PFMS)** ensure tracking and optimization of government expenditure, reflecting Kautilya's audit systems.

Economic prudence in Kautilya's framework was not merely about revenue collection but about sustaining a **prosperous and contented populace**, ensuring long-term political stability.

### 3.3 Public Welfare: Infrastructure, Agriculture, and Disaster Management

Kautilya devoted significant attention to **public welfare** as a core state responsibility.

**His directives included:**

- Building and maintaining roads, water reservoirs, and irrigation canals.
- Encouraging agricultural expansion through incentives.
- Implementing famine relief measures.
- Protecting forests and wildlife for resource sustainability.

**Modern parallels include:**

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** for rural infrastructure development.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)** for irrigation.
- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** for structured disaster response.

Kautilya's inclusion of **disaster preparedness**—especially for floods, droughts, and famines—demonstrates an early recognition of **resilience planning**, now a central theme in climate change adaptation policies.

### 3.4 Accountability: Audits and Anti-Corruption Measures

A hallmark of the *Arthashastra* is its robust anti-corruption mechanisms. Kautilya meticulously described potential frauds in revenue collection, trade, and military supplies, proposing stringent penalties for misconduct (Boesche, 2002).

**He also advocated for:**

- Surprise inspections.
- Separation of powers in revenue collection and auditing.
- Whistleblower-like provisions where citizens could report official misconduct.

**In contemporary terms, these translate to:**

- **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** as an independent audit authority.
- **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)** to combat corruption.
- **Right to Information Act (RTI)** enabling public oversight.

Kautilya’s insight that “just as it is impossible not to taste honey or poison when it is placed on the tongue, so it is impossible for a government servant not to eat up a part of the king’s revenue” (*Arthashastra*, Book II) reflects a timeless awareness of human tendencies, justifying the need for strong oversight.

**3.5 Modern Relevance in Public Administration**

Kautilya’s principles intersect with multiple pillars of modern public administration and governance reforms:

- **Good Governance** – Ethical decision-making and citizen-centric policies.
- **Decentralization** – Empowerment of local institutions.
- **Public Financial Management** – Efficient use of public resources.
- **Public Accountability** – Transparency and citizen oversight.

Contemporary administrative strategies—like the **Citizen’s Charter**, **e-Governance**, and **Social Audit mechanisms**—echo his governance model. Moreover, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), find philosophical support in Kautilya’s emphasis on justice, efficiency, and public welfare.

**3.6 Integrating Arthashastra Principles into 21st Century Governance**

While historical contexts differ, the *Arthashastra* offers adaptable strategies for:

- **Administrative training:** Civil services curricula can incorporate Kautilyan statecraft for leadership development.
- **Policy design:** Balancing economic growth with welfare programs, as per Kautilya’s emphasis on *artha* and *dharma*.
- **Institutional resilience:** Embedding anti-corruption measures in all administrative levels.

**Table 4: Selected Arthashastra Principles and Policy Adaptations**

Arthashastra Principle	Contemporary Policy Adaptation
Delegation to local officials	Panchayati Raj empowerment, urban local governance
Rational taxation	GST, progressive taxation policies
State role in welfare	MGNREGA, rural infrastructure programs
Regular audits	CAG reports, public expenditure tracking systems
<b>A n t i - c o r r u p t i o n</b>	Lokpal Act, CVC investigations

#### 4. Decentralized Governance through Panchayati Raj: Continuity of Indigenous Models

Decentralized governance has long been a cornerstone of India's socio-political fabric. The *panchayat*—a council of five or more elders chosen by the community—served as the nucleus of village administration for centuries. Rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), these institutions emphasized **consensus-based decision-making, community participation, and local accountability**. The formal recognition of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) under the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992** marked a revival and institutionalization of these indigenous governance models in the modern democratic framework.

##### 4.1 Historical Roots of Panchayat Governance in IKS

References to *panchayats* are found in ancient texts such as the *Rig Veda*, *Mahabharata*, and *Dharmashastras*, which depict village councils as autonomous decision-making bodies. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (3rd century BCE) outlined **local administrative units**—including *janapadas* (districts) and *gramas* (villages)—where governance was participatory and leaders were accountable to the community (Rangarajan, 1992).

**Historically, these councils performed multiple roles:**

- Dispute resolution (*nyaya panchayats*)
- Maintenance of public resources
- Regulation of trade and taxation
- Protection of cultural norms and traditions

This localized governance structure enabled **context-specific solutions** tailored to the ecological, cultural, and economic conditions of each region.

##### 4.2 Constitutionalization through the 73rd Amendment

The **73rd Amendment** transformed PRIs into a **three-tier structure**:

- **Gram Panchayat** at the village level
- **Panchayat Samiti** at the block/intermediate level
- **Zilla Parishad** at the district level

**Key Provisions:**

- Regular elections every five years
- Reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women
- Establishment of State Finance Commissions
- Devolution of 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule, including agriculture, health, education, and water management (Government of India, 1992).

### 4.3 Panchayati Raj and IKS Linkages

PRIs embody core IKS governance principles:

- **Local Self-Rule (*Swaraj*):** Echoes Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of *Gram Swaraj*, rooted in self-reliance and autonomy.
- **Community-Based Dispute Resolution:** Informal mechanisms that resolve conflicts swiftly, drawing from customary law.
- **Participatory Budgeting:** Collective decision-making on public expenditure mirrors traditional practices where village resources were allocated through open consensus.

These linkages ensure that **modern PRIs are not alien impositions but evolved continuations** of time-tested indigenous systems.

### 4.4 Functional Domains of PRIs in Sustainable Development

The table below illustrates the convergence between PRI functions and IKS principles for sustainable and inclusive governance.

**Table 5: PRI Functions and their IKS Foundations**

PRI Function	IKS Foundation	Sustainable Development Impact
Local resource management	Sacred groves, water harvesting traditions	Biodiversity conservation, water security
Dispute resolution	<i>Nyaya panchayats</i> , customary laws	Social harmony, reduced legal costs
Agricultural planning	Traditional cropping calendars, soil wisdom	Food security, resilience to climate variability
Education promotion	Gurukul traditions, community teachers	Literacy, skill development
Public health initiatives	Siddha, Ayurveda, community health workers	Affordable healthcare, preventive medicine

### 4.5 Case Studies Illustrating PRI-IKS Synergy

#### 4.5.1 Hiware Bazar, Maharashtra

Under the leadership of the Gram Panchayat, this drought-prone village adopted **watershed management** rooted in traditional water conservation practices like *johads* and percolation tanks. This led to increased groundwater levels and improved agricultural productivity (Singh, 2010).

#### 4.5.2 Punsari, Gujarat

Known as a “model village,” Punsari integrates modern amenities with **community-driven decision-making**. Gram Sabha meetings serve as platforms for consensus building, reflecting ancient *sabha* traditions.

#### 4.5.3 Tribal Villages in Nagaland

Village Councils operate under the Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act, combining **customary law** with statutory governance. This hybrid model safeguards indigenous practices while complying with constitutional mandates.

#### 4.6 Challenges in Strengthening PRI-IKS Integration

Despite their potential, PRIs face multiple challenges:

- **Inadequate Devolution:** States often retain control over functions and finances.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Lack of training in modern administrative tools.
- **Political Interference:** Weakens autonomous decision-making.
- **Documentation Deficit:** Traditional knowledge is often unwritten and vulnerable to loss.

#### 4.9 Policy Recommendations for Enhancing PRI-IKS Synergy

- **Capacity Building Programs:** Training PRI members in both modern governance tools and local knowledge systems.
- **Digital Platforms for Knowledge Sharing:** Recording and archiving traditional practices for replication across regions.
- **Legal Safeguards for Customary Law:** Recognition within the statutory framework to protect indigenous dispute resolution methods.
- **Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation:** Community-led audits to ensure accountability.

### 5. Community Wisdom and Environmental Governance: Traditional Knowledge in Forest and Water Management

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) encompass a vast repository of ecological wisdom, developed over millennia through close interaction with diverse ecosystems. In traditional Indian societies, environmental governance was not a discrete administrative activity but an integrated element of daily life, cultural practices, and spiritual philosophy. The principle of *Prakriti Raksha* (protection of nature) formed a moral imperative, influencing land use, water management, and biodiversity conservation (Gadgil & Berkes, 1991).

This section examines three emblematic examples—**sacred groves**, **Kudimaramathu**, and **Zabo systems**—which demonstrate how community wisdom ensured sustainable forest and water management. These indigenous models not only safeguarded ecological integrity but also reinforced social cohesion and equitable resource distribution.

### 5.1 Sacred Groves: Cultural Ecology for Biodiversity Preservation

Sacred groves, known by various names such as *Kavus* in Kerala, *Devrais* in Maharashtra, and *Sarnas* in Jharkhand, are patches of forest preserved through religious or cultural sanctions. These groves are traditionally dedicated to local deities, and cutting trees, hunting, or any form of resource extraction is either strictly regulated or entirely prohibited (Malhotra et al., 2007).

Ecologically, sacred groves serve as biodiversity hotspots, harboring endemic and endangered species. They also act as micro-watersheds, maintaining local hydrological cycles. From a governance perspective, management of sacred groves is community-driven, with rules enforced through customary law rather than external regulation.

**Table 6: Ecological and Social Functions of Sacred Groves**

Function	Ecological Impact	Social Impact
Biodiversity preservation	Protects endemic species and genetic diversity	Sustains traditional herbal medicine systems
Watershed protection	Maintains groundwater recharge	Supports agriculture and livestock
Cultural cohesion	Reinforces shared identity and religious practices	Encourages intergenerational stewardship

Sacred groves align with **SDG 15** (*Life on Land*) by ensuring terrestrial ecosystem conservation and with **SDG 13** (*Climate Action*) by contributing to carbon sequestration and climate resilience.

### 5.2 Kudimaramathu: Collective Water Tank Maintenance in Tamil Nadu

Kudimaramathu refers to the traditional system of community-led maintenance of irrigation tanks in Tamil Nadu. Dating back to the Chola period (9th–13th century CE), this practice involved voluntary labor contributions (*shramdaan*) by villagers to desilt tanks, repair bunds, and maintain sluices before the onset of the monsoon (Sivaramakrishnan, 1995).

This model exemplifies decentralized environmental governance where the responsibility for water resource management rests with the beneficiaries themselves. It ensured equitable water distribution, reduced the risk of tank breaches, and prolonged the life of irrigation infrastructure.

Post-independence, Kudimaramathu declined due to the centralization of irrigation management and the expansion of mechanized systems. However, its revival has been recognized as a cost-effective and socially empowering approach, especially under Tamil Nadu’s recent water conservation programs.

#### Key governance lessons from Kudimaramathu:

- **Collective responsibility:** Encourages local accountability.

- **Low-cost maintenance:** Reduces state expenditure while improving efficiency.
- **Social capital building:** Strengthens inter-village cooperation and conflict resolution.

### 5.3 Zabo Systems of Nagaland: Integrating Farming, Forestry, and Water Conservation

The Zabo system, practiced in the Phek district of Nagaland, is a centuries-old indigenous method of integrated farming and water harvesting adapted to hilly terrain (Sarma & Sarma, 2010). “Zabo” means “impounding water” in the local Chokri dialect. The system involves:

- Forested hilltops serving as catchment areas.
- Water collected in ponds through contour channels.
- Controlled release to irrigate terraced paddy fields.
- Integration of livestock rearing, aquaculture, and composting.

This multi-layered approach conserves soil, prevents erosion, and maintains soil fertility without synthetic inputs. The governance of Zabo systems is based on customary laws of the Chakesang tribe, which allocate maintenance responsibilities and regulate water use.

**Table 7: Comparative Overview of Three IKS-Based Environmental Governance Models**

Feature	Sacred Groves	Kudimaramathu	Zabo Systems
Primary resource focus	Forest biodiversity	Water tanks for irrigation	Integrated water-agriculture
Governance structure	Religious/customary	Community-led voluntary labor	Tribal customary law
Ecological outcome	Biodiversity conservation	Enhanced irrigation efficiency	Soil and water conservation
SDG alignment	13, 15	6, 13, 15	2, 6, 13, 15

### 5.4 Linking IKS to Contemporary Environmental Governance

While these traditional practices were shaped by local ecology and culture, their core principles—community ownership, sustainability, and equitable access—are highly relevant to modern environmental governance. They offer alternatives to centralized, top-down approaches that often fail to account for local contexts.

Reviving and integrating these systems requires:

- **Legal recognition** of customary governance rights (as under the Forest Rights Act, 2006).
- **Capacity building** to adapt traditional practices to current challenges such as climate variability.

- **Hybrid models** combining traditional wisdom with modern technology (e.g., GIS mapping of sacred groves, drone-assisted tank monitoring).

## 5.5 Policy Implications and SDG Alignment

IKS-based environmental governance models contribute to multiple Sustainable Development Goals:

- **SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation):** Kudimaramathu and Zabo systems enhance water availability.
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** All three models strengthen ecosystem resilience.
- **SDG 15 (Life on Land):** Sacred groves protect biodiversity and habitats.
- **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** Zabo systems support food security through sustainable agriculture.

By formally integrating these practices into state and national environmental policies, India can advance both ecological sustainability and community empowerment.

## 6. Case Studies on Village Self-Governance in Tribal and Rural India

Village self-governance in India is deeply embedded in the country's socio-cultural fabric, with roots tracing back to the *sabhas* and *samitis* of the Vedic era and later the *panchayat* systems that regulated village life. While the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) institutionalized the Panchayati Raj system, several communities—both tribal and rural—had already sustained autonomous governance models rooted in indigenous traditions and collective decision-making. This section examines three notable examples: **Mendha Lekha** in Maharashtra, **Hiware Bazar** in Maharashtra, and **Nagaland Village Councils**, highlighting their distinctive approaches, successes, and implications for sustainable governance.

### 6.1 Mendha Lekha, Maharashtra – Gram Sabha-led Forest Management

Mendha Lekha, a Gond tribal village in Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, has become a national model for **Gram Sabha-led forest governance**. The village's motto, "*In Mendha Lekha, decisions are made by consensus, not by majority,*" encapsulates its participatory ethos (Tara & Kumar, 2018).

#### 6.1.1 Background and Governance Structure

- **Population:** Approximately 450 people from the Gond community.
- **Key Governance Body:** Gram Sabha (*general village assembly*), recognized under the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996.
- **Decision-Making Process:** Consensus-based; all adult members have an equal voice.

### 6.1.2 Forest Rights and Community Control

Mendha Lekha was the first village in India to secure community forest rights (CFR) under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006. The Gram Sabha assumed full control over 1,800 hectares of forest, including the right to harvest, process, and sell bamboo—a resource previously monopolized by the Forest Department (Shrivastava, 2014).

### 6.1.3 Achievements

- Increased annual income through sustainable bamboo harvesting.
- Enhanced biodiversity due to community-led conservation practices.
- Reduced illegal logging and poaching through community vigilance.

## 6.2 Hiware Bazar, Maharashtra – Watershed Development and Participatory Governance

Hiware Bazar, a drought-prone village in Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra, underwent a remarkable transformation from a water-scarce settlement to one of India's most prosperous villages.

### 6.2.1 Background and Governance Structure

- **Population:** Around 1,250 people.
- **Key Governance Body:** Gram Sabha under Panchayati Raj system.
- **Leadership:** The transformation began in the early 1990s under the leadership of Popatrao Pawar, an elected *sarpanch*.

### 6.2.2 Watershed and Resource Management

The village implemented integrated watershed development, banning water-intensive crops and liquor, and enforcing grazing restrictions. Rainwater harvesting structures, check dams, and contour trenches revived groundwater levels (Pawar & Joshi, 2017).

### 6.2.3 Achievements

- Per capita income rose from ₹832 in 1995 to over ₹30,000 in 2015.
- Migration reversed; young people returned for agricultural and allied livelihoods.
- Recognized as a model village under the *Adarsh Gram Yojana*.

## 6.3 Nagaland Village Councils – Customary Law-based Administration

Nagaland's village governance operates under a unique **customary law-based framework** recognized by Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution. The Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act (1978) formalized these structures without undermining traditional practices.

### 6.3.1 Background and Governance Structure

- **Population:** Varies; each Naga tribe governs its villages autonomously.
- **Key Governance Body:** Village Council, elected as per customary norms.
- **Legal Autonomy:** Village Councils have powers over resource management, taxation, and dispute resolution.

### 6.3.2 Customary Governance Practices

Village Councils adjudicate disputes according to tribal customs, manage forests and land, and coordinate development activities. Community participation is integral, and decisions are often made through consensus (Aier, 2016).

### 6.3.3 Achievements

- High community compliance due to cultural legitimacy.
- Effective conservation of community forests.
- Integration of traditional governance with state and central schemes.

## 6.4 Comparative Analysis

The three case studies illustrate diverse yet converging principles of village self-governance: participatory decision-making, sustainable resource management, and cultural integration.

**Table 8: Comparative Features of Village Self-Governance Models**

Feature	Mendha Lekha (Maharashtra)	Hiware Bazar (Maharashtra)	Nagaland Village Councils
<b>Governance Basis</b>	Gram Sabha under PESA & FRA	Gram Sabha under Panchayati Raj Act	Village Council under Article 371(A) & customary law
<b>Decision-Making</b>	Consensus	Majority voting with participatory consultation	Consensus/tribal norms
<b>Resource Focus</b>	Forests (bamboo, biodiversity)	Water resources, agriculture	Forests, land, local resources
<b>Key Achievements</b>	Community forest rights, biodiversity protection	Watershed revival, income growth	Cultural preservation, sustainable land use
<b>Replicability</b>	High in tribal forest areas	High in drought-prone regions	High in culturally cohesive tribal societies

## 6.5 Lessons for Sustainable and Inclusive Governance

- **Legal Empowerment Matters** – Legislative recognition (PESA, FRA, Article 371A) strengthens community autonomy.
- **Resource-Centric Planning** – Governance is most effective when tied to locally significant resources.
- **Participatory Ethos** – Consensus or participatory voting fosters legitimacy and compliance.
- **Leadership and Vision** – Transformative leadership, as in Hiware Bazar, catalyzes community mobilization.
- **Cultural Context** – Governance frameworks thrive when rooted in cultural identity, as seen in Nagaland.

## 6.6 Implications for Policy and Practice

- **Scaling Up Models:** State governments can adopt elements of Mendha Lekha’s forest governance in other PESA areas.
- **Integrating Water Ethics:** Hiware Bazar’s water management principles can inform drought-prone regional planning.
- **Customary-Statutory Synergy:** Nagaland demonstrates the potential for integrating customary law with constitutional governance.
- **Digital Integration:** Leveraging digital platforms for Gram Sabha documentation and decision transparency can complement traditional methods.

## 7. Digital Governance and IKS: Bridging Tradition and Technology

Digital governance in India is often viewed through the lens of efficiency, transparency, and scalability. While modern e-governance initiatives such as **Digital India** aim to harness ICT for improved public service delivery, the integration of **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** adds a deeper dimension: cultural continuity, localized solutions, and community ownership. Traditional governance frameworks—such as *gram sabhas*, *nyaya panchayats*, and water management councils—have long relied on transparency, consensus-building, and record-keeping. Modern digital tools can enhance these time-tested mechanisms, allowing them to function more efficiently and inclusively in a rapidly digitizing society (Bhatnagar, 2014).

This section examines how blockchain, mobile applications, and geospatial technologies can bridge the gap between IKS principles and contemporary governance systems, ensuring that tradition and technology complement rather than replace one another.

### 7.1 Blockchain for Transparent Land Records

Land ownership disputes have historically been a major source of rural conflict. Ancient Indian administration maintained meticulous land records through *patwaris* and *karnams*, stored in temple archives or local offices. However, these

records were vulnerable to damage, loss, and manipulation. Blockchain technology provides a tamper-proof, decentralized ledger that mirrors the **IKS principle of trust through community verification**.

#### **Potential Benefits of Blockchain in IKS-based Land Governance:**

- Immutable record-keeping aligned with traditional community consensus validation.
- Reduced corruption through verifiable transaction histories.
- Integration with historical cadastral maps, preserving cultural topography.

**Case Example:** The Andhra Pradesh government’s pilot blockchain land registry integrates legacy survey maps with GPS coordinates, echoing the village *nadu* system of collective land validation (Mehta & Bansal, 2020).

### **7.2 Mobile Applications for Panchayat Decision Tracking**

The *panchayat* system is a cornerstone of IKS governance, emphasizing participatory decision-making. Traditionally, resolutions were recorded in community registers and verbally communicated during *gram sabhas*. Mobile governance (*m-governance*) platforms can digitize these processes while retaining the participatory essence.

#### **Features of Panchayat Decision Tracking Apps:**

- **Live streaming** of *gram sabha* meetings for transparency.
- **Public dashboards** displaying budgets, resolutions, and project progress.
- **Feedback mechanisms** for citizen suggestions and grievance redressal.

The **e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project**, under the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, has introduced applications like *PlanPlus* and *ActionSoft* that allow structured planning and monitoring. Incorporating IKS elements—such as traditional water rights or temple trust resource allocations—into these apps can ensure culturally sensitive governance (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022).

### **7.3 GIS Mapping of Traditional Water Bodies**

Water management in India has historically relied on indigenous systems like *kudimaramathu* in Tamil Nadu, *phad* irrigation in Maharashtra, and *johads* in Rajasthan. These systems were mapped orally, with knowledge transmitted across generations. Today, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping offers a way to document, visualize, and revive such heritage infrastructure.

#### **Benefits of GIS in IKS Water Governance:**

- Digital archiving of traditional water structures, including their historical significance.
- Integration with hydrological models to assess current viability.
- Overlaying socio-cultural data, such as ritual uses, to ensure multi-stakeholder planning.

**Example:** The *Bhuvan Panchayat* portal developed by ISRO includes layers for water bodies, agricultural zones, and soil types, enabling *panchayats* to integrate IKS water-use norms into their planning processes (ISRO, 2021).

## 7.4 Synergy Between Tradition and Technology

A critical challenge in digital governance is ensuring that technology adoption does not override the community’s role in governance. The IKS approach requires that technology be:

- **Inclusive** – accessible to low-literacy users through multilingual interfaces.
- **Culturally adaptive** – incorporating local decision-making norms and rituals.
- **Collaborative** – encouraging co-creation with community elders and traditional leaders.

**Table 9: Comparative Analysis of Traditional IKS Practices and Digital Governance Tools**

IKS Governance Element	Traditional Mechanism	Digital Tool Equivalent	Expected Outcome
Land records	Handwritten registers, temple archives	Blockchain registry	T a m p e r - p r o o f , community-verified ownership
Panchayat resolutions	Verbal communication, public gatherings	Panchayat mobile apps	R e a l - t i m e , transparent decision tracking
Water body mapping	Oral maps, memory-based planning	GIS mapping platforms	Precise, archived, and integrated water planning
Resource allocation	Customary rights, seasonal calendars	D a t a - d r i v e n planning software	Efficient and equitable distribution

## 7.5 Policy and Implementation Considerations

### Capacity Building:

- Digital literacy programs for panchayat members and community leaders.
- Training modules that link IKS-based governance principles with ICT tools.

### Legal Frameworks:

- Recognition of digital records as valid in customary law contexts.
- Integration of traditional dispute-resolution data into official databases.

### Infrastructure Support:

- Reliable internet connectivity in rural and tribal areas.
- Provision of low-cost, multilingual devices.

## 7.6 Case Illustration: Combining Kudimaramathu with GIS and Blockchain

In Tamil Nadu, *kudimaramathu*—a collective desilting and maintenance practice—has been digitally documented using GIS to map irrigation tanks. Blockchain has been piloted to track funding contributions from villagers, ensuring transparency. This hybrid model has:

- Reduced conflicts over resource sharing.
- Revived neglected water bodies.
- Created digital archives for future reference.

Such initiatives demonstrate how **ancient participatory practices** can be preserved and scaled through modern digital systems.

## 8. The Role of IKS in Conflict Resolution, Justice Systems, and Alternative Dispute Mechanisms

Conflict resolution in India has historically been grounded in community-based, consensus-driven approaches that prioritize social harmony over punitive measures. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers rich traditions of dispute settlement through *gram sabhas*, *nyaya panchayats*, caste councils, and other customary bodies. These mechanisms operated on principles of *dharma* (righteousness), restorative justice, and collective decision-making. In contrast to the often adversarial and time-consuming formal judicial process, these indigenous systems emphasized reconciliation, relationship repair, and community cohesion (Baxi, 2017).

In the current context, where the Indian judiciary faces a backlog of over 50 million cases (National Judicial Data Grid, 2024), integrating IKS-based mechanisms into modern Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) frameworks offers a pathway to reduce delays and enhance access to justice, particularly in rural and tribal regions.

### 8.1 Historical Context of Indigenous Dispute Resolution

Ancient Indian legal literature, such as the *Dharmashastra*, *Arthashastra*, and *Narada Smriti*, underscores the role of local assemblies in resolving disputes. These forums relied on respected elders, community leaders, and mutually agreed mediators to adjudicate matters.

#### Key features of traditional justice systems included:

- Accessibility for all members of the community.
- Minimal cost and procedural simplicity.
- Priority to social harmony over individual retribution.
- Use of oral testimony, customary laws, and religious norms.

The *nyaya panchayat* system, institutionalized in the post-independence era through the Panchayati Raj framework, was a formal recognition of these traditions, though its implementation has varied across states (Bhargava, 2020).

## 8.2 Principles Underpinning IKS-Based Conflict Resolution

The ethical and procedural underpinnings of IKS-based dispute resolution can be summarized as follows:

**Table 10: Principles Underpinning IKS-Based Conflict Resolution**

Principle	Description	Modern ADR Equivalent
Restorative Justice	Focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships between parties.	Mediation, Conciliation
Collective Decision-Making	Involvement of community representatives to ensure legitimacy of outcomes.	Community Mediation Panels
Cultural Sensitivity	Application of local customs, language, and traditions to dispute resolution.	Culturally Adapted ADR Practices
Speed and Accessibility	Quick hearings without excessive procedural formalities.	Fast-track ADR
Consensus over Coercion	Solutions accepted voluntarily by all parties rather than imposed unilaterally.	Facilitative Mediation

## 8.3 Integrating IKS with Modern ADR Frameworks

India's Arbitration and Conciliation Act (1996), the Legal Services Authorities Act (1987), and the Gram Nyayalayas Act (2008) provide statutory backing for ADR and rural justice delivery. However, the integration of IKS into these frameworks remains limited.

### Potential integration strategies include:

- **Formal Recognition of Customary Laws** – Especially in Scheduled Areas under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution (Rao, 2019).
- **Capacity Building for Local Mediators** – Training *panchayat* leaders and elders in contemporary legal principles while preserving indigenous approaches.
- **Hybrid Dispute Resolution Panels** – Comprising both traditional leaders and legally trained mediators.
- **Digital Documentation of Customary Practices** – Creating databases of precedents from traditional justice systems for reference and transparency.

Such integration could serve dual purposes: preserving cultural identity while ensuring compliance with constitutional guarantees and human rights norms.

## 8.5 Case Studies of Effective IKS-Based Dispute Resolution

**Mendha Lekha, Maharashtra:** The village's Gram Sabha functions as the supreme decision-making body, resolving disputes related to forest resources and land boundaries without resorting to courts. Decisions are recorded and enforced collectively, ensuring compliance through social accountability.

**Nagaland Village Councils:** Governed by the Nagaland Village and Area Councils Act (1978), these councils resolve family, land, and community disputes based on customary law. Their decisions are binding within the community, reducing dependency on the formal judicial system.

**Khap Panchayats in Haryana:** While controversial for certain socially regressive verdicts, these assemblies demonstrate the enduring influence of localized justice, underscoring the need for reform-oriented integration rather than abolition.

## 8.4 Benefits and Challenges of Integration

### Benefits:

- **Speed and Cost-Effectiveness:** Reduces case pendency and legal expenses.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Enhances legitimacy and community buy-in.
- **Restorative Outcomes:** Promotes reconciliation over punishment.

### Challenges:

- **Risk of Bias:** Decisions may be influenced by entrenched social hierarchies.
- **Human Rights Concerns:** Potential conflict with constitutional rights, particularly gender equality.
- **Standardization:** Difficulty in ensuring uniform application of justice.

## 8.5 Policy Recommendations

- **Legislative Amendments** to formally incorporate validated customary dispute resolution methods into ADR statutes.
- **Pilot Programs** in select districts to test hybrid IKS-ADR models.
- **Training Modules** for judicial officers and *panchayat* leaders on integrating indigenous practices within constitutional limits.
- **Safeguards** to prevent misuse, including oversight by district-level ADR authorities.

## 9. Educational Reforms and NEP 2020: Embedding Governance Ethics through IKS in Higher Education

The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** envisions an education system rooted in India's heritage while being responsive to the demands of the 21st century. One of its transformative aspects is the formal integration of **Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)** into higher education. This integration is not limited to history or literature but extends to governance ethics, civic responsibility, and sustainable development principles derived from India's indigenous traditions. By

embedding governance ethics inspired by *Arthashastra*, Panchayati Raj, and environmental stewardship into curricula, NEP 2020 seeks to nurture ethically grounded, culturally aware, and socially responsible graduates (Ministry of Education, 2020).

### 9.1 IKS as a Framework for Governance Ethics

IKS offers a **values-based governance framework** drawn from sources like the Vedas, *Dharmashastras*, *Arthashastra*, and the lived traditions of local self-governance. Principles such as *dharma* (righteous duty), *nyaya* (justice), and *lokasangraha* (collective welfare) serve as guiding ethical anchors for leadership and administration (Sharma, 2021). Embedding these in higher education ensures that governance is seen not merely as a technical skill but as a moral responsibility.

### 9.2 Curricular Integration under NEP 2020

NEP 2020 calls for universities and colleges to develop **credit-bearing courses and modules** focused on:

- **Arthashastra:** Ancient statecraft, economic planning, and public welfare systems (Kautilya, trans. 1992).
- **Panchayati Raj and Local Governance:** Democratic participation and decentralized administration.
- **Environmental Ethics in IKS:** Traditional water management, forest conservation, and sacred ecology.
- **Civic Education in Local Cultural Contexts:** Using regional histories, folklore, and indigenous dispute resolution models to teach participatory governance.

**Table 11: Illustrative IKS-Based Courses for Governance Ethics**

Course Title	Core Themes	Learning Outcomes
<i>Governance in the Arthashastra</i>	Statecraft, fiscal responsibility, anti-corruption measures	Apply ethical and economic principles from Kautilya to modern policy challenges
<i>Panchayati Raj: Tradition and Transformation</i>	Gram Sabha structures, decentralization, gender participation	Design participatory governance models for rural and urban contexts
<i>Environmental Governance in IKS</i>	Sacred groves, water harvesting, biodiversity preservation	Develop sustainable environmental management plans based on traditional practices
<i>Civic Leadership in Local Cultural Contexts</i>	Folk assemblies, customary law, conflict resolution	Facilitate inclusive, culturally informed leadership in community governance

### 9.3 Pedagogical Approaches

Embedding governance ethics through IKS requires innovative pedagogy:

- **Case Study Method:** Examining historical and contemporary examples of IKS-led governance, such as the *Kudimaramathu* water system in Tamil Nadu or the forest governance of Mendha Lekha in Maharashtra.
- **Experiential Learning:** Field visits to Gram Sabhas, interaction with panchayat leaders, and study of living traditions of dispute resolution.
- **Interdisciplinary Projects:** Collaborations between political science, environmental studies, and philosophy departments to design governance models grounded in IKS.
- **Digital Integration:** Use of digital archives, IKS portals, and virtual simulations of ancient governance systems (IKS Division, MoE, 2022).

### 9.4 Civic Education Rooted in Local Contexts

Civic education under NEP 2020 emphasizes **local cultural contexts** as entry points to governance ethics. For example:

- In coastal Tamil Nadu, teaching disaster management through indigenous fishing community practices.
- In the North-East, using tribal council structures to explain consensus-based decision-making.
- In Rajasthan, studying *Johad* (water harvesting) as a case of community-driven environmental governance.

Such localization ensures that governance ethics is not abstract but tied to the students' lived environment and heritage.

### 9.5 Challenges in Implementation

While NEP 2020 provides the policy direction, implementation faces hurdles:

- **Curriculum Design Expertise:** Need for scholars proficient in both IKS and modern governance.
- **Faculty Training:** Inadequate capacity among educators to teach IKS content with academic rigor.
- **Resource Availability:** Limited access to authentic IKS materials in higher education institutions.
- **Assessment Methods:** Measuring ethical orientation and civic responsibility remains complex.

### 9.6 Opportunities for Policy Innovation

Integrating governance ethics via IKS creates opportunities to:

- Build **globally distinctive governance curricula** rooted in indigenous values.
- Develop **leadership programs** for civil services and local government officials based on IKS ethics.

- Enhance **policy research** by aligning ancient wisdom with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **10. Institutionalizing IKS: Policy Challenges and Opportunities in Bureaucratic Structures**

The institutionalization of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) within governance frameworks requires navigating the complex interface between traditional wisdom and modern administrative structures. While IKS offers community-driven, sustainable, and culturally embedded governance models, their integration into bureaucratic systems presents both significant challenges and transformative opportunities.

### **10.1 Policy Challenges in Mainstreaming IKS**

#### ***10.1.1 Perceived Incompatibility with Modern Governance Systems***

One of the primary challenges lies in the perception that indigenous governance models are incompatible with the demands of modern, globalized economies. Bureaucratic institutions, often modeled on colonial administrative frameworks, prioritize standardization, hierarchical decision-making, and uniform procedures (Bhattacharya, 2019). In contrast, IKS emphasizes context-specific solutions, consensus-building, and adaptive practices rooted in local ecology and culture. This divergence can lead to resistance from policymakers and administrators accustomed to top-down governance.

#### ***10.1.2 Standardization of Diverse Local Practices***

India's diverse cultural and ecological landscapes have generated a variety of local governance practices—from *gram sabhas* in central India to *panchayats* in Tamil Nadu and tribal councils in the Northeast (Raghavan, 2021). Standardizing such varied models into a unified policy framework risks eroding their contextual relevance. Moreover, codifying customary practices without adequate community participation can result in tokenistic adoption rather than genuine empowerment.

#### ***10.1.3 Institutional Resistance and Capacity Gaps***

Existing bureaucratic structures often lack the institutional capacity to engage meaningfully with indigenous governance systems. Civil servants may have limited exposure to traditional governance mechanisms, leading to misunderstandings about their operational value. Furthermore, the absence of structured training on IKS in administrative curricula exacerbates the gap between policy intent and on-ground implementation.

### **10.2 Opportunities for Integrating IKS in Bureaucratic Systems**

#### ***10.2.1 Embedding IKS in Civil Services Training***

One of the most promising pathways for institutionalizing IKS is embedding relevant modules in the training of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and State

Civil Service officers. By including case studies on *Arthashastra*, community-led resource management, and Panchayati Raj evolution, training academies can foster cultural competence and policy innovation skills among officers (Mehta, 2020). This not only enhances governance responsiveness but also ensures that policies are grounded in socio-cultural realities.

### 10.2.2 Legal Frameworks to Protect Indigenous Governance Rights

A robust legal framework is essential to protect the autonomy and authority of indigenous governance systems. The **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA)** provides a precedent by recognizing the role of Gram Sabhas in Scheduled Areas. Expanding such protections to other traditional governance bodies can prevent the erosion of local decision-making powers under centralized governance regimes (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2018).

### 10.2.3 Policy Co-Design and Participatory Governance

Creating platforms for policy co-design, where bureaucrats, community leaders, and subject experts collaborate, can bridge the gap between IKS and modern governance. These participatory processes ensure that the integration of IKS is not a top-down imposition but an organic incorporation that respects local autonomy.

**Table 12: Comparative Framework: Challenges vs. Opportunities**

Challenges	Opportunities
Perceived incompatibility with modern governance	Embed IKS modules in IAS/State Civil Services training
Risk of eroding diversity through standardization	Legal frameworks protecting indigenous governance rights
Institutional resistance and capacity gaps	Policy co-design platforms enabling collaborative governance
Limited administrative exposure to IKS	Integrating IKS into e-governance and digital public service delivery models

## 10.3 Strategic Recommendations

- **Curriculum Development:** The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) should develop IKS-focused modules in collaboration with the Indian Knowledge Systems Division, Ministry of Education.
- **Community-Led Documentation:** Bureaucracies should support community-led documentation of governance practices to inform policymaking without homogenizing diverse traditions.
- **Legislative Expansion:** Extend the principles of PESA beyond Scheduled Areas to urban and semi-urban indigenous governance contexts.

- **Digital Platforms for IKS:** Leverage digital governance tools to document, disseminate, and scale successful indigenous governance models.

## 11. IKS and Governance in Urban Planning and Smart Cities: Lessons from Ancient Townships

Urban planning in India has deep roots in ancient knowledge systems. The archaeological remains of Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Dholavira, and other Indus Valley cities reveal sophisticated urban layouts that balanced functionality, environmental sustainability, and social organization. These ancient models, rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), offer vital lessons for governance in contemporary urban planning and smart city initiatives.

### 11.1 Key Features of Ancient Indian Urbanism

**Mohenjo-Daro** (c. 2600 BCE) exemplifies strategic city planning, with a grid-based street network, efficient drainage systems, and zoning for residential, commercial, and public use (Possehl, 2002). Such integration reflects an early governance model emphasizing public health, accessibility, and resource optimization.

**Table 13: Key Features of Ancient Indian Urbanism**

Feature	Ancient Implementation	Smart City Relevance
<b>Grid Planning</b>	Orthogonal streets facilitating movement	Reduces congestion, supports smart transport
<b>Drainage Systems</b>	Covered sewers, soak pits	Stormwater management, flood resilience
<b>Mixed-Use Zoning</b>	Residences near markets and public areas	Promotes walkability, reduces travel emissions
<b>Public Spaces</b>	Granaries, assembly halls	Civic engagement, cultural preservation

### 11.2 Governance Mechanisms in Ancient Townships

Ancient urban governance prioritized **collective welfare** through city councils or administrators who oversaw infrastructure maintenance, sanitation, and trade regulation. Such participatory management aligns with modern ideas of **citizen-centric smart governance**, where technology is used to enhance public service delivery.

### 11.3 Integrating IKS into Smart City Planning

Modern smart cities—such as those under India’s Smart Cities Mission—can integrate IKS principles in the following ways:

- **Water-sensitive design** inspired by ancient tank and stepwell systems.
- **Compact mixed-use layouts** to reduce carbon footprint.
- **Community governance models** using digital platforms for participatory decision-making, echoing ancient civic assemblies.

By combining **heritage-based planning** with **IoT-enabled urban management**, cities can achieve sustainability while preserving cultural identity.

## 12. Women and Governance in IKS: Matrilineal Societies and Grassroots Leadership

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide a robust framework for understanding gender-inclusive governance rooted in cultural traditions. While mainstream governance structures in India have historically been patriarchal, several indigenous models have elevated women as central actors in decision-making. This is particularly evident in matrilineal societies and grassroots leadership initiatives, where women’s authority is embedded in social, economic, and political domains.

### 12.1 Matrilineal Societies and Decision-Making

Matrilineal communities, such as the **Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia** tribes of Meghalaya, follow a lineage system where property and clan identity are inherited through women. Although political authority is often exercised by men in council positions, women in these societies wield significant influence in consensus-building, conflict resolution, and economic planning (Nongbri, 2003). This contrasts with patriarchal governance models by ensuring that community welfare decisions incorporate women’s perspectives as custodians of land and resources.

### 12.2 Grassroots Women’s Leadership

In southern India, women-led water committees in Tamil Nadu exemplify IKS-informed participatory governance. These committees manage irrigation scheduling, oversee tank desilting under *Kudimaramathu* traditions, and coordinate with local panchayats for resource allocation (Reddy & Dev, 2006). Such leadership not only preserves ecological sustainability but also strengthens community trust in governance.

**Table 14: Comparative Roles of Women in Governance in Select IKS Contexts**

Region & Community	Governance Role	Decision-Making Influence Level
Khasi (Meghalaya)	Land custodians, cultural heritage keepers	High in economic & social matters
Garo (Meghalaya)	Property inheritance, clan leadership	Medium in political councils

Tamil Nadu (Water Committees)	Irrigation management, conflict mediation	High in local resource governance
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### 12.3 Relevance to Sustainable and Inclusive Governance

Integrating women’s traditional roles into formal governance can enhance transparency, equity, and resilience. These IKS-based models align with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on inclusive institutions. Recognizing and institutionalizing such systems can counteract the underrepresentation of women in formal politics.

## 13. Global Perspectives: Indigenous Governance Systems across Civilizations and India’s Comparative Advantage

Indigenous governance systems worldwide share foundational principles of community participation, environmental stewardship, and ethical leadership. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), with its emphasis on *dharma* (righteous duty) and local self-governance, aligns closely with governance traditions of the Māori in New Zealand, Native American tribal councils in North America, and African customary law systems. Comparative analysis of these models provides valuable insights into the universality and adaptability of indigenous governance in addressing modern challenges.

### 13.1 Commonalities Across Indigenous Governance Models

All these systems emphasize:

- **Consensus-building:** Decision-making processes that value collective agreement over majority dominance.
- **Environmental stewardship:** Sacred regard for natural resources as community assets.
- **Community rights:** Protection of communal land, cultural practices, and self-determination.

**Table 15: Comparative Features of Indigenous Governance Systems**

Governance Feature	Indian Knowledge System (IKS) – Panchayati Raj	Māori <i>Rangatiratanga</i>	Native American Tribal Councils	African Customary Law
<b>Decision-making</b>	Consensus & Gram Sabha voting	Collective agreement	Council deliberation	Elders’ consensus
<b>Environmental focus</b>	Sacred groves, water tanks	Kaitiakitanga (guardianship of	Stewardship of tribal lands	Communal land care

		land/sea)		
<b>Legal framework</b>	Customary norms + codified laws	Treaty of Waitangi	Federal recognition in U.S. law	Customary law + state
<b>Leadership selection</b>	Elected & hereditary mix	Hereditary & elected	Elected or hereditary chiefs	Elders or chiefs

### 13.2 India’s Comparative Advantage

India’s IKS enjoys a unique comparative advantage because it operates within a constitutional democracy that formally recognizes local self-governance through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. Unlike many indigenous systems that function parallel to national governments, IKS-based institutions such as Panchayati Raj have both **constitutional legitimacy** and **grassroots cultural resonance** (Mathew, 2020). This dual legitimacy enables seamless integration of traditional consensus-based governance into modern policy frameworks, enhancing participation and accountability.

Furthermore, IKS draws from a documented corpus—*Arthashastra*, *Dharmashastras*, and regional administrative codes—allowing it to adapt to diverse socio-economic contexts without losing its indigenous character. This adaptability is critical for scaling governance models in multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies.

## 14. Future Directions: Policy Recommendations for Integrating IKS in 21st Century Governance

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern governance requires a structured, multi-tiered strategy that bridges traditional wisdom with contemporary administrative mechanisms. The following policy recommendations aim to institutionalize IKS for sustainable, inclusive, and culturally resonant governance.

### 14.1 Establishment of an IKS-Governance Research Council

A dedicated **IKS-Governance Research Council (IKS-GRC)** under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Panchayati Raj can act as a think tank to document, evaluate, and innovate governance models rooted in indigenous traditions. Its functions should include commissioning research, funding pilot projects, and providing advisory inputs to policymakers (Rangarajan, 2020).

### 14.2 Digitization and Archiving of Indigenous Governance Records

Many traditional governance records—village resolutions, customary law documents, and water-sharing agreements—are at risk of loss. Digitizing these

resources not only preserves them for posterity but also makes them accessible to scholars, administrators, and communities (Sharma & Rao, 2019).

**Table 16: Digitization Priority Framework**

Priority Level	Content Type	Stakeholders Involved	Expected Outcome
High	Customary laws, land records	State Archives, Gram Sabhas	Legal accessibility, dispute resolution
Medium	Water/forest management records	Irrigation Dept., NGOs	Sustainable resource planning
Low	Oral histories, governance folklore	Cultural ministries, Universities	Cultural continuity, educational use

### 14.3 Mandating IKS-Based Sustainability Audits

Local bodies should be mandated to conduct **IKS-based sustainability audits** alongside financial audits. These would assess governance performance in resource management, community participation, and cultural preservation (UNESCO, 2019). Integration with **SDG monitoring frameworks** would ensure alignment with global sustainability goals.

### 14.4 Fostering Academic-Government-Civil Society Collaborations

Partnerships between universities, government agencies, and civil society organizations can create a **living laboratory** for IKS in governance. Collaborative initiatives might include capacity-building workshops, curriculum integration under NEP 2020, and joint policy drafting (Chakrabarty, 2021).

## 15. Conclusion

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into governance presents a transformative opportunity to blend cultural heritage with contemporary administrative needs. Rooted in the principles of *dharma*, *nyaya*, and community participation, IKS provides time-tested approaches to decentralization, environmental stewardship, and social equity. By reinterpreting ancient frameworks such as the *Arthashastra*, Panchayati Raj traditions, and indigenous dispute resolution systems, India can develop governance models that are not only efficient but also deeply inclusive and sustainable. These systems emphasize ethical leadership, collective decision-making, and responsible resource management—values critical for addressing current challenges like climate change, rural empowerment, and policy alienation. Institutionalizing IKS requires adaptive strategies, policy innovation, and the integration of digital tools to ensure scalability without diluting cultural integrity. As India aspires to lead in sustainable governance, embedding IKS into policy and practice will reinforce administrative

resilience, foster community ownership, and contribute to a globally relevant model of culturally informed development.

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### 3.

## **Decoding the Indian School of Thought: Embracing and Integrating the Indian Knowledge System into the study of Comparative Religions: The J & K Approach**

Mr. Ishaan Arora

### **Abstract**

*India is a land which offers plethora of opportunities to commemorate the richness which its intellectually sound heritage tends to offer. What makes India's rich culture an inspiration for intellectuals across the globe is the fact that it has never been static rather it has always been dynamic with space and scope for adjusting itself in accordance with the need of the changing era and reigns. What lies at the epitome of this enriching culture and tradition of India is the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), a term that has been a talk of the town in the contemporary times when India has been envisioned as the global leader who shall be leading not just the third world countries but also the so called developed or the mainstream ones. To simplify, Indian Knowledge System implies an amalgamated - cum - holistic approach encompassing several domains in its ambit such as philosophy, science, art, spirituality as well as practical ethics. On a similar note lies the importance of another allied stream, i.e. the stream of comparative religion which bestows to offer a well-organized way to discover the varied as well as shared tenets of the global spiritual traditions. The intertwining or intersection of the Indian Knowledge System as well as Comparative Religion carries a reformative potential as far as the contemporary Indian Education System is concerned specifically in the regions like Jammu and Kashmir, where everything starting from the administrative setup to the soft power such as tourism, agro-forestry, etc. have drastically transformed owing to the abrogation of its special status under Article 370. This manuscript is an attempt to decode the potentialities as well as the learning that the Indian school of thought tends to offer for being incorporated into the contemporary schools of thought. In addition, it will also explore the various tenets of the intersection as well as intertwining of the Indian Knowledge System and Comparative Religion as well as the significance it holds to study and discover these aforementioned domains simultaneously.*

**Keywords:** *Kashyap, Purva Paksha, Vada Parampara, Comparative Religion, Inter-faith mutual coexistence, Traditional Knowledge System.*

### **Review of Literature**

Dr. Peerzada Muneer, a senior scholar in the Centre for the study of Comparative Religion, University of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi has proactively discussed the importance that lies into integrating the disciplines of the Traditional Knowledge Systems as well as Comparative Religion as far as the objective of maintenance of peace and harmony is concerned. He has clearly stressed the dire need that has arisen in the contemporary times to amalgamate this proactive

discipline mix into the Indian Education's structural – functional framework so as to reap requisite rewards in the form of peace, tranquility as well as pride in one's culturally vibrant heritage, etc.

### **Research Methodology**

The research manuscript is centered around a mix of primary as well as secondary data. The Primary data has been collected via conducting interviews as well as getting the schedules filled by the enumerators while the secondary sources so referred here encompasses whole list of journals, articles, newspapers as well as books.

### **An Overview**

The Indian subcontinent entails as well as encompasses a wonderful history that celebrates multiple customs interwoven amidst various traditions as well as religions amassing the warmth of interfaith relationships. It has been an epicenter of a plethora of wisdom and intellectuality. One of the major strengths that is evidently felt in the Indian traditions is that they were never static or outdated rather they were and are dynamic, having the potential of getting continuously and constantly evolved with the pace of changes and reforms taking place in our surroundings thereby surmounting there importance as far as the contemporary society is concerned.

To highlight in reference to the above aforementioned statement are the theories and works of one of the renowned economists as well as administrators of his time i.e. Kautilya who is additionally referred to as Vishnu Gupta or Chanakya. Kautilya was the guru of Chandragupta Maurya and the statement here implies that whatever knowledge and wisdom the ruler amassed is credited to Kautilya. Kautilya was an all rounder; a master of every field be it diplomacy, economics, international relations, public administration and so on. Kautilya has contributed to all these spheres immensely by way of propounding several theories which were not just relevant then but holds immense significance and relevance ion the contemporary globalized society. For instance: Kautilya's Mandal Theory, a renowned theory that deals with the sphere of international relations and it states that "Our Enemy's Enemy is our Friend". This theory was a path breaking contribution as far as the domain of international relations is concerned and this theory holds immense importance even today as many nations across the globe have been following as well as imbibing the crux of this popular saying so as to build and manage their relationship with the nations across the globe. In addition to this, who can forget the famous Saptanga Theory i.e. the Seven Elements Model where in he laid down the seven prominent pillars on whom rests the entire fundamentals of administration. Here he mentioned about the ruler, the praja (people), kosha (treasury), danda, army, durga (Fort) etc. which serves as the focal point of every administrative set up and without paying due allegiance to which it

won't be possible for any administrative setup to survive successfully. This theory entails as to what are the responsibilities that a person as a king or savior of the nation need to conform to so as to ensure that he amasses a significant place amidst the hearts of the people or praja. On similar lines the responsibilities and functions of each and every element has been illustrated in detail in his magnum opus "Arthashastra" which is an ancient treatise on economics and public administration. Besides Kautilya, there are several other thinkers whose works and contributions have laid down the basis for the discoveries and innovations being brought up in the contemporary society. For instance the idea of surgery was initiated by Sushruta, grammar by Panini, and the lists is endless. All these contributions have been grouped together and assigned a categorical term called the Indian Knowledge System or the Traditional Knowledge System.

The term Indian Knowledge System is a wider term which entails and encompasses a spectrum of domains be it philosophy, art, science, ethics or spirituality. It is owing to the crucial as well as pivotal space that the Traditional Knowledge System amasses in the global society that the pioneer apex level education body in India i.e. the University Grants Commission (UGC) has come up with an official notice for incorporating the Indian Knowledge System<sup>3</sup> into the well-established curriculum of the various universities and colleges pan India. This notice has been issued with the intention of propagating the essentials of the Indian Knowledge System amongst the PG students and offer them an opportunity to delve deeper into understanding and discovering the true realms of the Intellectual Heritage that India is home to. The crucial role that Indian Knowledge System plays in reforming the contemporary trends in the Indian education system can be very well understood and decoded by the fact that this school has found a due mention and inculcation in the New Education Policy 2020. In lieu of the New Education Policy 2020, several centers have been constituted specifically dedicated to this domain so that path breaking research and curriculum development can be efficaciously undertaken. The centers have been vested with the responsibility to integrate the Indian Knowledge System with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) in all possible and probable ways so that students are offered with plethora of opportunities to decode and unfurl the mainstream subjects with the aid of the new horizons that the Indian Knowledge System offers.

### **Embracing the Traditional Knowledge System: the J & K Approach**

It is not denying the fact that the contemporary union territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been an epicenter of knowledge, wisdom and hermitage since the very beginning of the "sanatana dharma". There is a whole list of sages available at our disposal whose inception can be traced as well as tracked from this beautiful heaven on Earth i.e. Jammu and Kashmir. On the similar lines, the contemporary

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<sup>3</sup>Bhatt, Kafeel Ahmad. "Embracing Indian Knowledge System." *Greater Kashmir*, January 12, 2025.

union territory of Jammu and Kashmir occupies a crucial and pivotal place amidst all those regions which have been instrumental in shaping as well as laying down the foundations of the Traditional Knowledge System. To state some more points on this domain, it is worth mentioning that at the heart of the Traditional Knowledge System lies Purva Paksha i.e. its regard for plurality. The term “Plurality” here implies that Indian Knowledge System offers a moral learning as well as obligation to respect and pay due heed to the opponent’s views and opinions. This has been the very basis of the learnings we all have acquired in our childhood from our mentors and family and this is also a trait which the contemporary management tycoons also assign prime importance to as far as undertaking the recruitment for big leadership roles and allied responsibilities are concerned. This trait is considered one of the prime factors around which is centered the contemporary work policies as well as ethics and this trait was already included and specified by the Indian Knowledge System at a time when such things were not very much prominent.

Besides the “Purva Paksha”, the Traditional Knowledge System also lays due impetus on the Vada Parampara i.e. the art of debating. Here it is worth acknowledging the fact that the Indian Knowledge System not only emphasizes the art of debate but also outlines the manner in which a healthy and amicable debate should follow. The forerunners of the Indian Knowledge System stress upon undertaking an amicable debate coupled with mutual regard, deeper inquiry and an broad mindedness. They lay impetus on the fact that one should maintain the dignity of the debating event and duly recognize the views and opinions so put forth by the opponents no matter one agrees with them or not, and this is what builds the foundation of the rules and regulations of the various debating events conducted at any levels be it local, national or international levels. These aforementioned points are not just restricted to the intellectual discussions but go beyond the boundaries of the intellectual discourse and are extendable to each and every aspect of the human life, thereby constituting Indian Knowledge System as an alive custom crucial to the contemporary society as well as the challenges being faced by it. In addition to this lies the power and strength of the Indian Knowledge System to apply spirituality as well as interdisciplinarity and integrate it with the contemporary domains of technology, governance mechanisms, science thereby fostering the pace of the holistic growth of the modern education framework thereby resonating beyond time and customs.

### **Decoding the J & K Model: Working out the Integration of Comparative Religion with the Indian Knowledge System**

As an academic endeavor, the domain of comparative religion encompasses the plethora of beliefs, theories and practices of the various religious groups available at the world’s disposal. It is worth stating here that the domain of Comparative Religion is nothing new to the contemporary society, it rather has its roots lying in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century wherein for the first time the term “comparative religion” found a mention in the magnum opus of Max Muller who developed an insightful discourse to study and decode the religion in a comparative context. The study of this domain has emerged as an anecdote in the contemporary times as it instills a sense of empathy, eradicates all kinds of prejudices and biases and plays a pivotal role in fostering dialogue in such times when the understanding of interfaith has become quite crucial and pivotal for the maintenance of worldly peace. The study of comparative religion further fosters the inculcation of the spirit of cultural relativism rather than ethno – centrism. Here by cultural relativism implies that one while regarding and respecting one’s own religion and culture pays due respect to and understands other religions and cultures persisting in the society simultaneously and by ethnocentrism we mean demeaning or defaming other cultures, traditions as well as religions while respecting one’s own culture and religion thereby considering one’s own religion the supreme force guiding everyone in the society.

Via the study of comparative religion, the students can delve deeper into experiencing as well as discovering the massive scale questions put forth by various traditions on the moral, metaphysical as well as philosophical fronts. For instance it is rightly stated that all the answers to a human being’s question about life as well as their very existence can be easily sought in the Bhagwad Gita. These texts including others such as the Buddhist Sutras, Jain Folklore, etc. offer varied yet crosscutting perspectives and perceptions on the notion of ethics, the notion of divinity and the very basic or fundamental aim of human existence. These texts inculcate real life instances of the various human counterparts, thereby going beyond the mundane textual analysis which aids the readers and followers to understand the logic that operates behind the observance of the plethora of rituals, festivities, and community customs and procedures thereby fostering the spirit of cultural relativism as well as mutual coexistence in the contemporary society.

There exists a very close and intimate relationship or bond amidst the Indian Knowledge System as well as the domain of comparative religion as both lay impetus onto fostering the spirit and culture of mutual respect and coexistence amidst the cultural diversity that the Indian Subcontinent encompasses. The Traditional Knowledge System’s pluralistic global view – visible in phrases like: “Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti”(Kafeel Ahmad Bhat, 2025)(M A Islam, 2017) implying there is one truth, however the witty express or put forth it in diverse manners. This notion deeply emanates from the very objectives of the domain of comparative religion. By amalgamating both these notions i.e. the Traditional Knowledge System as well as comparative religion students can amass a broader insights of the treasure of spiritual wisdom and cultures thereby commending the already persisting array of faiths in the contemporary society. To mention here an instance of the principle of Ahimsa (non - violence) which serves as a cornerstone and epicenter around which the entire crux of the Buddhist as well as Jain literature

and mythology is constructed may be superimposed or allied with the similar moral instructions of Christianity and Islam, thereby providing the student community a detailed and transparent perspective or notion on enduring human values. Such an academic testament not only empowers the student community's academic endeavors but at the same time also instills cross faith harmony, peace as well as social cohesion. The metaphysical rigor of the Traditional Knowledge System coupled with the pertinent methods and philosophical juncture of the comparative religion constitutes an unmatched structural – functional framework for delving deeper and unfurling the man's quest for truth as well as meaning.

The amalgamation of comparative religion into the Indian Educational framework along with the notion of the Traditional Knowledge System as its subset is not merely a formality rather crucial as well as essential. This deadly mix is going to play a pivotal role in sorting out the various pressing demands and wants of the contemporary society. In a nation as culturally vibrant as Indian subcontinent, inculcating the spirit or sense of cultural relativism, spurring mutual regard amongst multiple communities is unavoidable. The domain of comparative religion can serve as an insightful tool to cover the lag in terms of the religious as well as cultural by presenting and unfurling the commonalities within diverse faith groups thereby putting a scope for a dialogue filled or empowered with cohesion.

The uprooting of the domain of comparative religion as well as the Traditional Knowledge System from the contemporary educational structural – functional framework has been instrumental in deviating the entire student community and even the teaching fraternity from enliven cultural ties. However, reinstating this mix with the contemporary educational framework will open diverse ways in which we all can enjoy and taste the richness that the Indian intellectual heritage used to offer thereby assuming pride in the fact that we have our roots implanted in the intellectually sound and rich sand of the Indian Subcontinent. This mix of the Traditional Knowledge System as well as Comparative Religion lays due impetus on the two most crucial qualities which are in demand by almost every recruiter or organization and i.e. self-introspection as well as critical inquiry. This eye-opening mix can inculcate the seed of fostering the analytical skill set as well as moral empowerment thereby nurturing the student community to easily and efficaciously decode the perplexing ethical as well as social dilemmas.

The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir is evidently known for the peculiar past enriched with cross faith interaction and keeping into note the cultural vibrancy of the erstwhile state, amalgamating and including the discipline of comparative religion can serve as a strong pillar in establishing communal harmony. Afcourse, who can forget the heinous and inhuman Kashmir riots of 1989 – 1990 when certain anti – national elements in the name of Allah resorted to brutal killings of the non – muslims regarding them as “Kaafirs”. Had this

domain coupled with the Indian Knowledge System been inculcated initially itself within the nation's educational structural – functional setup, maybe we could have foregone such brutal killings of the innocent back then. Decoding the international cultures via the lens of the Traditional Knowledge System enables students to amass requisite cultural literacy to survive in this interconnected globe. Further, it equips them to develop their personalities in a multifaceted manner and engage pro – actively in every sphere or segment be it the academics, diplomacy or multidimensional as well as culturally vibrant workplaces.

The erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir being the hotspot of the hermitage as well as the flag bearer of the Indian Knowledge System has initiated several steps so as to work out an amalgamation of the Traditional Knowledge System with the contemporary education's structural – functional framework(Kafeel Ahmad Bhat, 2025). The contemporary government with adequate support and aid from the University Grants Commission has been successful in constituting a curriculum framework that engulfs a holistic syllabus in the sense that it very efficaciously balances the textual analysis along with the practical real time exposure. In this sense and direction, a plethora of courses have been initiated by the Jammu and Kashmir government such as: Comparative synthesis of sacred literature, conducting field exploration and visits to the places of adoration and worship and holding continuous and comprehensive proactive debates. As far as the faculty segment is concerned, for them certain refresher courses as well as induction training are being carried out so as to acquaint them to the techniques as well as tools to instruct upon the theories and literature constituting the Traditional Knowledge System coupled with the discipline of comparative religion<sup>4</sup>. These refresher programmes not only provides the faculty with a platform to acquire the necessary instructional as well as pedagogical skill set but at the same time instills and inculcates within them the requisite level of sensitivity and depth that the teaching of the Indian Knowledge System as well as Comparative Religion demands. Various pro – active pedagogical methodologies incorporating critical delving, dialogue and regard for vibrant perspectives have been efficaciously employed while teaching the Indian Knowledge System to the students. Several multi - media resources as well as real – time case studies have been incorporated as part of the IKS curriculum so as to make the learning of the students more practical and engaging. Regional notions like the syncretic traditions of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir have been included so as to make the context more relatable and engaging, thereby offering students with a plethora of opportunities to realize pride in the richness that their culturally rich heritage entails.

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<sup>4</sup>B., News. "Kashmir can be renamed Kashiya." *Dainik Bhaskar*. May 8, 2025.

In times when wars and violence in the name of religion and culture is seen as the only option available at one's disposal, a successfully constituted mix of the Indian Knowledge System as well as Comparative Religion can pave ways to realize the dream of a harmonious as well as an amicable society besides merely fulfilling the academic endeavors. By reconstituting the foundation of the education's structural – functional set up, India can refurbish its intellectual assets thereby catering to the challenges and hurdles put forth by the pluralistic globe. This model holds immense significance for the contemporary Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir wherein inculcating cross faith contexts is altogether a cultural demand as well as a walkway to enduring harmony.

Thus, in this connection in an official press release, the Jammu and Kashmir government has very well come up with the stance that as of now the domain of Comparative Religions stands launched at the college as well as university level but sooner the government will enter into due deliberation with organizations like - NCERT to introduce this course right at the school stage so that the very foundation of the students stands built with the bricks of this exemplary mix of the Indian Knowledge System as well as Comparative Religion.

It is worth stating here that recently our honorable Home Minister Shri Amit Shah inaugurated a book entitled “Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh: Through the Ages” at Delhi(News, 2025). In this event he put forth his intention of reconstituting the nomenclature of Kashmir in the name of “Kashyapa” who was a sage in ancient India and had his roots traced to Jammu and Kashmir region. He stated that there existed a time frame of approximately 150 years when history's dimensions were restricted from Dilli Dariba to Balli Maraan as well as Lutyen to Gymkhana only and nothing beyond these set boundaries. This manipulated history was written to impress the then rulers and stay in their so called good books. But now is the need of the hour to free oneself from the clutches of this so called manipulated historical texts. Amit Shah requested all the historians to reframe history keeping into consideration the relevant facts and figures. Amit Shah also stated that Kashmir has an in destroyable link with India. There is no denying the fact that how exploiters embezzled the various temples in Ladakh, and how mistakes were committed intentionally even after gaining independence from the painful clutches of the British Rule. The prolonged discussions encompassing, Shankaracharya, Silk Route, Hemis Math, etc. clearly proves that the very foundations of the Indian culture and hermitage was laid down in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. This book entails and throws light on the 8000 year old history of the region resting upon well – established facts as well as figures. What made this session all the more interesting is the fact when Mr. Amit Shah stated that all the nations across the globe have geo – political existence but it is only the Indian Subcontinent in the whole globe that has geo – cultural relevance as well as existence. India right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Gandhar to Odisha and from Bengal to Assam stands intimately linked via the cultural ties and bonds that have been

created since ages. Amit Shah further stated that those who intend to define or see India in terms of the geo – political landscapes or relevance will never be able to define this culturally fond and vibrant landscape that India is home to.

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### **Brief Author Bio**

Mr. Ishaan Arora, is a Senior Research Fellow of Political Science (University Grants Commission) in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Malaviya National Institute of Technology, Jaipur, Rajasthan, amassing a plethora of knowledge and experience in the Domain of Political Science, Public Administration and Public Policy. With over 3 years of teaching and research experience, he has established himself as a dedicated and determined educator committed towards ensuring the ethos of academic wisdom, thereby contributing towards shaping the minds of the future leaders. Having earned his Masters in Public Administration and being a rank holder in the Department of Political Science, University of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, he amasses a multidisciplinary understanding of the social, economic as well as the political dynamics operational in the contemporary society. Besides this, he has been a recipient of the Student Achievers Award for being a rank holder in the CBSE Board Exams for the Session 2015-16 conferred upon him jointly by Dainik Bhaskar Group as well as Resonance. He has served as an Editor in the Journal of Illuminatus, Department of Economics, St. Xavier’s College, Jaipur. Being UGC NET qualified and securing the prestigious national level Junior Research Fellowship, further underscores his commitment towards striking academic excellence and integrity. Throughout his academic journey, he has immensely demonstrated an unmatched passion for unfurling complex political phenomenon and discourse. As an avid researcher, he has come up with path-breaking research papers revolving around public policy and contemporary politics published in various reputed journals indexed in renowned databases like: SCOPUS, Web of Science, ABDC, etc. He has also contributed several book chapters covering the spheres of International Relations, Education and Contemporary Society as well as Climate Change, etc. published by national and international publishers of repute. With his diverse academic background and unwavering dedication to

contribute proactively to the academia, he continues to inspire, empower and shape the next generation of intellectual scholars and leaders.

Mob. +91 8239786882

Email – 2022rhs9511@mnit.ac.in

## 4. The Art of Debate - Logic and Reasoning in Ancient Indian Texts

**Dr. Nyatundo George Oruongo**

*Assistant Professor in Law*

*Christ Academy Institute of Law*

*Bengaluru*

*Mob: +917899249241*

*E-mail: georgeprasam@gmail.com*

*July 5, 2025*

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### **Abstract**

*Ancient Indian thought is a mine of inexhaustible treasure. Its young philosophical underpinning laid a solid foundation for argumentation and debate. Vedic literature had evolved exhaustive systems of reasoning which have been long foundational to many global intellectual traditions. The Nyaya school's logical proclivities, Sankara's approach to dialectics and Buddhist rational intelligence stitched together a strong textile of debated argumentative strategy. The former proclivities prioritized the pursuit of truth through free and open discourse above victories in intellectual contests. This paper aims at two fundamental goals. The first deals with the evolutionary trajectories binding logical frameworks in classical Indian texts and analyzing their relevance (or otherwise) to our current context. The second one takes a closer look on how classical debate methodologies can be enhanced by current educational practices and critical thinking skills. The chapter postulates that ancient Indian logical systems may have offered more holistic models of reasoning than contemporary western logic models. This gave additional dimensions by combining moral sentiments with sound knowledge. This work grows from close examination of detailed discussion of each traditional schools of philosophy, like Nyaya, Vaisheshika and Buddhist logic. Translations of Nyaya writings by Ganganatha Jha still command a great deal of respect. Modern commentators like Bimal Matilal and Jonardon Ganeri bridge the classical tradition and contemporary logic. That said, academic research tends to wax philosophical elements while hugging the trees and ignoring the forest. Many comparative studies exist, which contrast ancient Indian ways of debate with modern argumentation theory. Therefore, there is yet a question that lingers on the depth of current educational establishments for traditional Indian thought and wisdom. The topical studies approach is not exhausted; its ability to treat our present degeneration in public participation and democratic discourse is only limited by its concentration on classical principles of debate. A proviso of these mature and rather conservative, methods is the observation that their empirical significance has not been systematically investigated in any academic study. This*

*dogmatic study is carried out on the basis of textual study of classical Sanskrit texts like Nyaya Sutras, Tarka Shastras and Buddhist logical treatises. Comparative methods either speak or parallel traditional to the contemporary logical tradition. Expert views on classical scholars and modern rationalists offer a broad range of outlook. Such studies offer practical relevance in educational context. With all this weight behind it, the importance of the contribution is portentous. Western democracies are threatened with the invasion of misinformation, polarised argumentation and the degradation of public discourse. Ancient Indian debate usage gives useful lessons for practical involvement in truth-seeking. These are methods that claim respect for opposition, distinct thinking and morality in argumentation. These tried steps may do a lot of good to the educational community by integrating it into pedagogies of the academia. Finally, the discussion leads to demonstrating that the wisdom of classical Indian text established a set of comprehensive debate standards which elevated critical thinking and knowledge on to a pedestal distinct from just winning the argument. Its sixteen categories of rational inquiry give a well-arranged view on intricate reasoning in the Nyaya system. The Buddhist schools of logic were innovative in their approaches to applying cause and effect to experimental test, as dictated by the need for inference. These systems developed more amiable methods of debate by balancing intellectual discipline and emotional pulse. Traditional gurukula education benefited the most for millenia. In short, democratic practice of debate and reasoning undoubtedly has much to gain from the logical foundations of ancient India. In contrast to ruthless cultures of debate, their approach to moral argument and the pursuit of truth offers alternatives. These ideas could improve critical thinking skills and aid the declining quality of public discourse if they were incorporated into current educational systems. This tried-and-true, invaluable methods are extremely effective when utilized to address contemporary issues in intellectual and democratic discourse.*

**Keywords:** *Nyaya philosophy, ancient Indian logic, debate methodology, argumentative reasoning, traditional pedagogy.*

## **I. Introduction: The Rich Heritage of Indian Logical Discourse**

Ancient Indian civilizations developed revolutionary systems of rational thinking that outrank most western philosophical practices by miles.<sup>i</sup> These frameworks egressed from practical demands of religious engagement and academic discussion, cementing India as a rare heart of intellectual inquiry.<sup>ii</sup> The Vedic era gave rise to structured forms of thinking through ritualistic discussions and interpretative debates that helped strengthen logical discourse.<sup>iii</sup> Religious writings needed meticulous attention and interpretation, leading to methodical models of reasoning that has moulded scholars over time and space. Vedic Indian debate culture addressed pluralistic needs beyond intellectual stimulation or scholarly rivalry.<sup>iv</sup> Intellectuals discovered truth through sincere exploration of thought and

not prizes in debate, introducing a new philosophy culture.<sup>v</sup> This approach characterized Indian schools of logic as non-adversarial models of argument in other cultures.<sup>vi</sup> Incorporating moral aspects with intellectual inquiry provided unprecedented methodological canvas that emphasized balance in morality in argument.<sup>vii</sup> Sanskrit literature preserved these revolutionary techniques of reasoning over centuries, allowing organic inter-generational transmission.<sup>viii</sup> Various philosophical schools added to the development of logical discussion, each evolving settled conclusions and methodologies.<sup>ix</sup> The Nyaya School established systematic methods of evidentiary study that were a fundamental aspect of Indian logic.<sup>x</sup> Buddhist rationalists refined techniques of analyzing cause and effect relations encouraged knowledge of logical affinity.<sup>xi</sup> Advaita Vedanta developed dialectical models of solving philosophical quagmires using futuristic processes of interpretation.<sup>xii</sup>

These norms stressed harmonization of ancient wisdom with technical proficiency in logical analysis.<sup>xiii</sup> Argumentation served not merely as a pedagogic exercise but also as a vehicle for spiritual and intellectual expedition.<sup>xiv</sup> The reconciliation of logical thought and moral action are dimensions of human action well captured within ancient Indian philosophical discourse. This synthesizing perspective resists modern pedagogic norms and democratic epistemologies.

## **II. Ancient Indian Debate Traditions: Emergence from Vedic Origins through Medieval Systematization**

The earliest structured patterns of argumentation are traceable in Vedic literature, leading to other patterns to Western logical discourse.<sup>xv</sup> Priestly ritual debates in ancient India created yardsticks for systematic thinking, which would lead to many years of philosophical change.<sup>xvi</sup> The Rigveda hymns contain dialogical exchanges between gods and sages, which are evidence of early recognition of argumentative propensity.<sup>xvii</sup> These exchanges demonstrate futuristic embracing of logical standards, particularly in cosmological speculations about the origin of the universe.<sup>xviii</sup>

The Upanishads carry dialogues that illustrate deep revolutionary logical reasoning.<sup>xix</sup> The Chandogya Upanishad features the unmissable discourse between Uddālaka and Śvetaketu, which manifests systematic examination to entrench metaphysical norms.<sup>xx</sup> These writings unveil prudent consciousness to the structure and legitimacy of arguments, especially in discussions concerning nature of truth and reality.<sup>xxi</sup> The Katha Upanishad's dialogue between Nachiketa and Death epitomizes the systematic pursuit of knowledge that became a symbol of Indian philosophical methodology.<sup>xxii</sup> Vedic interactions habitually targeted cosmological and metaphysical issues that required acumen not just pedestrian thinking.<sup>xxiii</sup> The Nasadiya Sukta of the Rigveda illustrates early epistemological doubts, refusing to settle for the possibility of certain knowledge about ultimate

reality.<sup>xxiv</sup> The proforma mostly involved two people engaging in systematic journey, generating models that would be polished in later philosophical usages.<sup>xxv</sup> These dialogues cemented the standard that truth must be a result of careful investigation rather than a random conclusion.<sup>xxvi</sup> The significance prize on truth-seeking rather than rewards accruing from mere victory become the defining feature of Indian debate traditions.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's detail of the interaction between Yajnavalkya and Gargi puts the spotlight on philosophical understanding rather than intellectual supremacy.<sup>xxviii</sup> This ethical element elevated Indian logical culture to that of informed argumentation.<sup>xxix</sup> The idea of satyameva jayate (truth alone triumphs) hatched out of this classical understanding, underlining truth as true end of any useful philosophical thinking.<sup>xxx</sup>

The Mahabharata guards many instances of ceremonial engagements that represent deep appreciation of logical fundamentals.<sup>xxxi</sup> The Bhagavad Gita brings forth Arjuna's moral quandary and Krishna's methodical counter as a template of philosophical argumentation.<sup>xxxii</sup> The epic's Shanti Parva secures profound debates on dharma, politics and ethics that use revolutionary reasoning techniques.<sup>xxxiii</sup> These discussions are proof of awareness of the significance of context and circumstance in moral thinking.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Characters in the Mahabharata employ sophisticated reasoning techniques to resolve complex moral dilemmas.<sup>xxxv</sup> The debate between Yudhishtira and Duryodhana before the dice game demonstrates understanding of logical consistency and the consequences of actions.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The text reveals awareness of logical fallacies and invalid reasoning, particularly in passages warning against deceptive argumentation.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The epic's treatment of the dharma-sankata (moral crisis) situations shows sophisticated understanding of ethical reasoning under uncertainty.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Post-Vedic literature witnessed the systematization of debate methodology into formal philosophical systems.<sup>xxxix</sup> The Nyaya Sutras of Akshapada Gautama codified principles of logical reasoning that had been developing in oral traditions for centuries.<sup>xl</sup> This foundational text established sixteen categories (shoḍaśa-padārtha) for analyzing arguments and knowledge claims, providing a comprehensive framework for logical analysis.<sup>xli</sup> The four means of valid knowledge (pramāṇa) - perception, inference, comparison and verbal testimony - became central to Indian epistemology.<sup>xlii</sup>

Buddhist texts like the Abhidhamma developed parallel systems of logical analysis that complemented and challenged Brahmanical approaches.<sup>xliii</sup> The Kathāvatthu presents systematic refutations of various philosophical positions, demonstrating sophisticated understanding of logical methodology.<sup>xliiv</sup> Buddhist logicians like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti later developed highly refined systems of inference and

causation analysis.<sup>xlv</sup> These traditions emphasized the importance of direct experience and logical consistency in establishing philosophical truths.<sup>xlvi</sup> Medieval commentators refined these early systems into comprehensive methodologies that addressed increasingly complex philosophical questions.<sup>xlvii</sup> Scholars like Uddyotakara in his *Nyāya-vārttika* expanded upon Gautama's foundational work, addressing criticisms and developing more sophisticated logical techniques.<sup>xlviii</sup> Vācaspati Miśra's *Nyāya-vārttika-tātparyaṭīkā* further refined these methods, integrating insights from various philosophical schools.<sup>xlix</sup> These commentaries demonstrate increasing sophistication in logical analysis while maintaining connection to original principles.<sup>l</sup>

The tradition maintained its emphasis on ethical reasoning throughout this development, ensuring that logical sophistication served broader philosophical and spiritual goals.<sup>li</sup> The integration of dharma (righteous duty) with logical analysis prevented the reduction of reasoning to mere technical exercise.<sup>lii</sup> This holistic approach distinguished Indian logical traditions from purely formal systems, emphasizing the connection between sound reasoning and moral development.<sup>liii</sup> The concept of *sad-ācāra* (good conduct) remained central to philosophical education, ensuring that logical training supported character development.<sup>liv</sup>

The systematization process involved the development of technical terminology that precisely captured logical concepts.<sup>lv</sup> Terms like *anumāna* (inference), *hetu* (logical reason), and *pakṣa* (subject of inference) became standardized across different philosophical schools.<sup>lvi</sup> This terminological precision facilitated sophisticated philosophical discourse and enabled systematic comparison of different logical approaches.<sup>lvii</sup> The development of narration ensured that these technical concepts get handed over from generation to generation of thinkers.<sup>lviii</sup> The educational methodology of the *gurukula* model facilitated the conveyance and growth of these logical traditions.<sup>lix</sup> Students received training under concerted attention of seasoned teachers.<sup>lx</sup> The emphasis on *pārāmarśa* (reflective consideration) motivated learners to embody logical principles and not merely memorize them.<sup>lxi</sup> This pedagogical leap guaranteed that logical training reaffirmed universal intellectual and spiritual depth.<sup>lxii</sup>

The usefulness of these systematized discourse traditions overflowed beyond the confines of philosophical schools to legal thinking and executive decision-making.<sup>lxiii</sup> The *dharmasāstra* literature adopted logical norms into legal methodology, guaranteeing that judicial decisions aligned themselves with rational reasoning.<sup>lxiv</sup> This blending of logical questioning with practical applications indicates the universal social merit of these intellectual tendencies.<sup>lxv</sup>

### III. The Nyaya School's Systematic Approach: Sixteen Categories of Logical Inquiry

The Nyaya school is one of the earliest to implement a systematic approach to logical reasoning in ancient India.<sup>lxvi</sup> Akshapada Gautama's Nyaya Sutras provide sixteen vital categories for analysis.<sup>lxvii</sup> These categories revealed all-embracing frameworks for probing knowledge claims and arguments.<sup>lxviii</sup>

The useful categories include four fountain heads of legitimate knowledge: perception, inference, comparison and testimony.<sup>lxix</sup> Each source requires conscious analysis to master its validity and compass.<sup>lxx</sup> Perception involves direct sensory experience of objects and phenomena.<sup>lxxi</sup> Inference draws conclusions from observed evidence through logical reasoning. Comparison establishes knowledge through analogy and similarity. Testimony relies on authoritative sources and reliable witnesses. The Nyaya system demands rigorous examination of each knowledge source.<sup>lxxii</sup> This prevents hasty conclusions and unsubstantiated claims.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

The categories also address objects of knowledge and their characteristics.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Doubt represents uncertainty requiring further investigation. Purpose defines the goals and intentions behind inquiry. Examples provide concrete illustrations of abstract principles. Established conclusions represent verified knowledge claims. The constituent parts of arguments include premises, reasoning and conclusions. Reasoning demonstrates the logical connection between evidence and claims. The system emphasizes clarity and precision in argumentative structure.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Refutation involves challenging invalid arguments and false claims.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Ascertainment establishes definitive knowledge through careful analysis. Discussion encompasses the broader context of debate and dialogue. Wrangling represents improper argumentation focused on victory rather than truth. Caviling involves finding fault without constructive purpose. Fallacies represent common errors in reasoning that undermine arguments. Points of failure identify where arguments break down or become invalid. Futile rejoinders are responses that fail to address the actual argument.

The Nyaya framework operates through systematic validation of knowledge claims. Each category serves specific functions in logical analysis. Perception requires direct contact between sense organs and external objects. The system recognizes ordinary perception and extraordinary perception. Ordinary perception involves normal sensory experience. Extraordinary perception includes yogic or supernatural awareness. Both forms demand verification through consistent observation patterns. Inference follows strict logical procedures. The system identifies three types of inference: for oneself, for others, and from prior experience. Inference for oneself involves personal reasoning processes. Inference for others requires demonstrating conclusions to different audiences. Inference from prior experience draws on accumulated knowledge. Each type must satisfy

specific validity conditions. Comparison operates through recognition of similarities between known and unknown objects. The process involves identifying shared characteristics. Comparison requires previous knowledge of at least one object. The system emphasizes accurate identification of relevant similarities. Irrelevant comparisons lead to faulty conclusions.

Testimony depends on reliable sources and credible witnesses. The system distinguishes between human and divine testimony. Human testimony requires trustworthy speakers with accurate knowledge. Divine testimony includes scriptural and revealed knowledge. Both forms need verification through consistent transmission.

The Nyaya system addresses twelve objects of knowledge beyond the four sources. These objects include the soul, body, sense organs and their interactions. The framework examines pleasure, pain, desire and aversion as knowledge objects. Effort, merit, demerit and their consequences receive systematic analysis. The system studies cognitive processes and their outcomes.

Doubt arises when evidence supports multiple conflicting conclusions. The system requires thorough investigation of doubtful claims. Doubt serves productive functions by preventing premature acceptance. Systematic doubt elimination leads to certain knowledge. The process involves examining all available evidence.

Purpose guides inquiry toward specific goals and objectives. The system recognizes different types of purposes in logical analysis. Some purposes seek theoretical understanding. Others aim at practical problem-solving. Purpose charts necessary methods and benchmark for assessment. Examples elucidate theoretical principles through existing occurrences. The system employs examples to demystify difficult ideas. Examples must convey the principles they represent with precision. Removed examples undercut logical thinking. The framework underlines effective picking of examples.

Established outcomes stand for verifiable knowledge propositions as legitimate and testable. The system undergoes through a multi-layer validation sequence. Results must pass the test of thoughtful review. The framework identifies itself as a definitive conclusion as against speculative conjectures. Once affirmed, such conclusions guide future investigation. The inherent units of arguments encompass postulates, chain of reasoning and conclusions. Postulates extend vital claims for arguments. Reasoning signifies the logical cord that links premises and conclusions. Together, the system requires precise and lucid expression of each unit. Incongruent and inconsistent arguments fall short of asserting any claims.

Reasoning involves a chain of events that demonstrates logical sine qua non between affirmation and judgment. The system sieves through legitimate and illegitimate reasoning tendencies. Legitimate reasoning is aligned with settled logical norms and standards whereas questionable reasoning undercuts the

chemistry of any posited affirmation. The framework included instruments for assessing the quality of reasoning, especially through peers. Contradiction put illegitimate claims to test through constructive rebuttals. The system requires positive contradiction that deepens critical thinking. This process, to be useful and effective, must conquer real arguments not to advance misrepresentations or manipulation. The framework esteemed dissent without being disrespectful. Genuine rebuttal resulted in better knowledge and learning. The purpose is to exclude possible doubts diligently. Under this arrangement, personal vendetta and vindictive rhetoric laced with unreasonable criticisms is eliminated. This is a ground where productive discussion that nourishes collective understanding is fertilized. This scheme focused on main ideas. It discouraged trivializing arguments for the sake of it. Such attempts as caviling which involves finding fault without constructive need were discouraged. A line was drawn differentiating between criticism and caviling. Caviling mainly focuses on petty points while taking major propositions for granted. This way, the opponent's thesis is preserved without undermining productive interaction.

Misconceptions signify usual gaps in reasoning that subvert the goal of arguments. The early Indian knowledge system filtered erratic patterns. Examples of these include misplaced analogies, baseless generalizations and non-linear reasoning. This framework offered tools for identifying and circumventing these misconceptions. Basically, understanding fallacies at source heightens logical thinking. Points of failure identify where arguments break down or become invalid. The system examines various failure modes in reasoning. Points of failure include inadequate evidence and logical errors. The framework helps identify vulnerable aspects of arguments. Recognizing failure points prevents flawed conclusions. Futile rejoinders are responses that fail to address the actual argument. The system identifies various types of futile responses. Futile rejoinders include irrelevant comments and personal attacks. The framework requires relevant and substantial responses. Futile rejoinders waste time and energy. This systematic approach provided comprehensive tools for logical analysis.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The categories remain relevant for contemporary reasoning and debate.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Modern logic can benefit from this holistic approach to argumentation.

#### **IV. Buddhist Logical Principles and Dialectical Methods: Analyzing Causation and Inference**

Buddhist philosophy developed sophisticated methods for analyzing causation and logical inference.<sup>lxxix</sup> The principle of dependent origination provided frameworks for understanding causal relationships.<sup>lxxx</sup> This concept emphasizes the interconnected nature of all phenomena.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Nothing exists independently without causes and conditions.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The doctrine of pratityasamutpada forms the cornerstone of Buddhist logical analysis.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> This principle asserts that all existence emerges through interdependent causation.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Each phenomenon

depends on multiple contributing factors for its manifestation.<sup>lxxxv</sup> The absence of any single cause prevents the arising of effects. Buddhist logicians like Dignaga and Dharmakirti refined methods of inference.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Their work established rigorous criteria for valid reasoning. The Buddhist approach emphasizes empirical observation and logical analysis.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> This methodology influenced both religious and secular philosophical traditions.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Dignaga's contributions to the theory of inference revolutionized logical discourse. He developed systematic approaches to distinguish valid from invalid reasoning. His work on perception and inference provided foundations for later Buddhist logic. Dharmakirti further refined these methods through detailed analysis of logical fallacies.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The Buddhist logical tradition distinguished between direct perception and inferential knowledge. Direct perception provides immediate awareness of phenomena without conceptual mediation. Inferential knowledge operates through logical reasoning and analysis. This distinction guided approaches to evidence and proof in Buddhist reasoning. The tradition developed sophisticated criteria for evaluating perceptual claims. Buddhist logicians analyzed the conditions necessary for valid perception. They identified factors that could distort or invalidate perceptual knowledge. This analysis included examination of sensory limitations and cognitive biases.

The Madhyamaka school developed dialectical techniques for resolving contradictions.<sup>xc</sup> Nagarjuna's method of prasanga exposed the logical consequences of opposing views. This approach revealed internal contradictions in apparently coherent positions.<sup>xc1</sup> The technique aimed at transcending dualistic thinking through logical analysis.<sup>xc2</sup> Prasanga reasoning demonstrates the absurd consequences of philosophical positions. This method does not assert alternative positions but reveals logical inconsistencies. The approach leads to the recognition of conceptual limitations in ordinary reasoning. Nagarjuna's dialectical method influenced centuries of philosophical development.

Buddhist debate traditions emphasized the cultivation of wisdom alongside technical skill.<sup>xc3</sup> Monastic education included formal training in logical reasoning. Students learned to analyze arguments and identify logical fallacies.<sup>xc4</sup> This training served both intellectual and spiritual development. The integration of logical analysis with ethical cultivation distinguished Buddhist approaches. Debate practice required adherence to principles of truthfulness and respectful discourse. Students developed skills in constructive argumentation rather than mere victory. This emphasis on ethical reasoning influenced the character of Buddhist philosophical discourse. The Buddhist approach recognized different levels of truth and understanding.<sup>xc5</sup> Conventional truth operates within everyday discourse and practical reasoning. Ultimate truth transcends conceptual limitations and dualistic thinking. This distinction informed approaches to debate and

argumentation. The two-truth theory provided frameworks for understanding the scope of logical analysis. Conventional truth remains valid within its appropriate domain of application. Ultimate truth reveals the limitations of conceptual thinking and ordinary reasoning. This distinction prevented absolute claims about logical methods and their conclusions. Buddhist logical methods influenced other philosophical schools.<sup>xvii</sup> The emphasis on empirical observation complemented systematic reasoning. This integration created more robust approaches to knowledge and truth. The Buddhist synthesis of experience and reason provided models for later philosophical development. Their methods influenced Hindu logical traditions and contemporary Western philosophy. The emphasis on causal analysis contributed to developments in scientific reasoning. Buddhist approaches to inference informed cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

The tradition developed sophisticated methods for analyzing causal relationships. Buddhist logicians examined the conditions necessary for valid causal inference. They distinguished between necessary and sufficient conditions in causal analysis. This analysis provided frameworks for understanding complex causal networks. The Buddhist approach to causation emphasized temporal and spatial relationships. Philosophers examined the remoteness factor for causality and effect relationship drawing a line from mere correlation. These technique molded both philosophical and applied uses of causal reasoning.

Buddhist dialectical methods embedded psychological inputs into logical analysis. Practice recognized the role of state of mind in reasoning processes. It was apt to the danger of emotional attachments, sentiment and conceptual biases tainting logical outcomes. Buddhist instruction addressed these psychological factors along with technical logical abilities. This integration of the state of mind with logical approach laid fertile grounds for objective paths to reasoning. This holistic feature placed Buddhist logic miles higher than other formal systems. The emphasis placed on mental cultivation confirmed a predisposition towards systematic logical investigation. Analysis offered means of determining the validity of arguments. Buddhist approaches to argument analysis emphasized clarity and precision. The tradition developed systematic methods for representing logical relationships. These methods supported more effective communication of complex reasoning.

Buddhist logical principles created frameworks for constructive disagreement. The tradition emphasized understanding opposing positions before criticism. This approach required careful analysis of alternative viewpoints. Buddhist debaters developed skills in representing opponents' arguments fairly. The emphasis on charitable interpretation elevated the quality of philosophical discourse. These methods contributed to more productive intellectual exchange. The Buddhist approach to disagreement provided models for contemporary democratic dialogue.

## V. Comparative Analysis: Ancient Indian Logic versus Contemporary Western Frameworks

The fundamental divergence between ancient Indian logical systems and contemporary Western frameworks lies in their epistemological foundations and methodological approaches.<sup>xcvii</sup> Western logic prioritizes formal validity and mathematical precision, establishing rigid structures that emphasize deductive certainty.<sup>xcviii</sup> Indian traditions, conversely, integrate ethical considerations with logical rigor, creating comprehensive systems that address both intellectual and moral dimensions of reasoning.<sup>xcix</sup> This integration reflects deeper philosophical commitments about the nature of knowledge and the purpose of logical inquiry.<sup>c</sup> Western syllogistic logic, tracing its roots to Aristotelian foundations, focuses primarily on the structural validity of argument forms.<sup>ci</sup> The emphasis remains on whether conclusions follow necessarily from premises, regardless of the truth value of those premises.<sup>cii</sup> Indian systems, particularly the Nyaya school, examine the broader epistemological context of knowledge claims through their systematic analysis of pramanas (valid means of knowledge).<sup>ciii</sup> This approach prevents the acceptance of formally valid but materially false conclusions by requiring rigorous examination of knowledge sources.<sup>civ</sup>

The Nyaya system's sixteen categories of logical inquiry demonstrate a more comprehensive approach to reasoning than Western formal logic.<sup>cv</sup> These categories include prameya (objects of knowledge), pramana (means of knowledge) and sambhava (doubt), creating a holistic framework for intellectual investigation.<sup>cvi</sup> Western ways of thinking basically quarantines certain parts of reasoning, such as propositional or predicate logic, but fails to address the general context of knowledge attainment.<sup>cvii</sup> This academic silos restrain the relevance of western logical techniques to complex real-world scenarios.<sup>cviii</sup>

Modern western democratic ethos emphasizes competitive argumentation as a rule. The unintended outcome of this contest is that truth seeking becomes secondary to intellectual victory.<sup>cxix</sup> Early Indian practices, epitomized by the notion of vada (constructive debate), stressed on reciprocal dialogue that aimed at cultivation of knowledge.<sup>cx</sup> This vital chasm mirrors opposing philosophical views regarding the function of logical engagement.<sup>cxii</sup> Indians viewed dialogue as a channel of spiritual and intellectual upliftment, that infests personal growth with intellectual inquiry.<sup>cxii</sup>

The disconnection of the western tradition's ways of reasoning from ethical standpoint results in a conveyor belt approach to logic that may turn immoral.<sup>cxiii</sup> Indian traditions appreciated the gridlocked mesh between logical thinking and moral behaviour, as supported by the concept of sadachara (right conduct) calling for right thinking.<sup>cxiv</sup> This integration prevents the misuse of logical techniques for manipulative or harmful purposes.<sup>cxv</sup> The emphasis on ethical reasoning ensures that logical prowess serves constructive rather than destructive ends.<sup>cxvi</sup>

Buddhist logical principles, particularly those developed by Dignaga and Dharmakirti, demonstrate sophisticated methods for analyzing causation and inference that complement Western approaches.<sup>cxvii</sup> These methods emphasize the examination of mental constructs and the relationship between perception and conception.<sup>cxviii</sup> Western logic typically focuses on external logical structures without addressing the psychological and phenomenological aspects of reasoning.<sup>cxix</sup> Buddhist logic's attention to mental processes provides valuable insights for understanding how reasoning actually occurs in human cognition.<sup>cxx</sup> The practical implications of these differences become evident in educational contexts. Modern Western education often treats logic as a purely technical skill, divorced from broader intellectual and moral development.<sup>cxxi</sup> Ancient Indian systems developed reasoning abilities within comprehensive frameworks of wisdom and understanding.<sup>cxxii</sup> The gurukula tradition exemplified this approach by integrating logical training with ethical instruction and practical application.<sup>cxxiii</sup> This holistic method may offer valuable insights for contemporary educational practices seeking to develop well-rounded thinkers.<sup>cxxiv</sup>

The concept of anumana (inference) in Indian logic demonstrates greater sophistication than Western deductive reasoning in certain respects.<sup>cxv</sup> Indian inference includes five-membered syllogisms that explicitly state the universal principle, particular instance and logical connection.<sup>cxvi</sup> This structure makes the reasoning process more transparent and accessible to participants in debate.<sup>cxvii</sup> Western syllogisms while more concise, may obscure important logical steps that could be questioned or examined.<sup>cxviii</sup>

Contemporary Western argumentation theory, influenced by pragma-dialectics and informal logic, has begun to incorporate some concerns addressed by ancient Indian systems.<sup>cxix</sup> However, these developments remain largely separate from formal logical training.<sup>cxx</sup> Indian traditions achieved this integration naturally through their philosophical foundations.<sup>cxxi</sup> The recognition that logical reasoning cannot be separated from broader human concerns represents a significant advantage of Indian approaches.<sup>cxxii</sup>

The temporal dimension of logical analysis differs markedly between these traditions. Western logic emphasizes timeless, universal principles that apply across all contexts.<sup>cxxiii</sup> Indian systems acknowledge the contextual nature of reasoning while maintaining rigorous standards for valid inference.<sup>cxxiv</sup> This flexibility allows for more nuanced analysis of complex situations without abandoning logical rigor.<sup>cxxv</sup> The balance between universality and contextuality represents a sophisticated approach to logical methodology.<sup>cxxvi</sup>

The integration of emotional intelligence with intellectual analysis in Indian traditions creates more balanced approaches to debate and reasoning.<sup>cxxvii</sup> Western

logic typically excludes emotional considerations as irrelevant to logical validity.<sup>cxviii</sup> Indian systems recognize that emotions can both enhance and impede clear thinking, requiring their conscious integration into logical processes.<sup>cxviii</sup> This awareness results in more detailed guidance in argumentation skills.<sup>cxli</sup> The stakes for modern democratic discussion are high. Western adversarial models of debate can cause polarization and decay in public discourse.<sup>cxli</sup> Indian traditions provide different models that favor respectful disagreement and cooperative truth hunting.<sup>cxlii</sup> These models would improve the quality of democratic deliberation by elevating common understanding above short term conquest.<sup>cxliii</sup> The ancient Indians' stress on the ethical character of argumentation offers valuable direction for public responsibility.<sup>cxliv</sup>

The passing and carry-over of logical knowledge among these traditions are opposed to each other. Western logic makes great use of written texts and formal education.<sup>cxlv</sup> Indian traditions emphasized oral transmission and direct guru-disciple interaction, creating more dynamic and personalized learning experiences.<sup>cxlvi</sup> This approach may offer insights for improving contemporary logical education by emphasizing interactive learning and practical application.<sup>cxlvii</sup>

## **VI. Findings: Integrating Ethical Considerations with Intellectual Rigor in Modern Education**

Contemporary educational systems can benefit significantly from ancient Indian approaches to logical reasoning.<sup>cxlviii</sup> The integration of ethical considerations with intellectual rigor creates more balanced educational outcomes that address both cognitive and moral development.<sup>cxlix</sup> Students develop technical skills alongside moral reasoning abilities through this comprehensive approach.<sup>cl</sup> This methodology addresses current challenges in educational practice by providing frameworks that emphasize character formation.<sup>cli</sup>

Modern democratic societies face significant challenges with misinformation and increasingly polarized debate.<sup>clii</sup> Ancient Indian debate traditions offer proven frameworks for constructive dialogue that prioritize understanding over confrontation.<sup>cliii</sup> The emphasis on truth-seeking over victory creates more productive discussions in academic and public settings.<sup>cliv</sup> These methodologies can substantially improve the quality of public discourse through structured reasoning approaches.<sup>clv</sup> Traditional gurukula education successfully implemented these principles for centuries, demonstrating their practical effectiveness.<sup>clvi</sup> Students learned logical reasoning within contexts of ethical development, creating integrated learning experiences.<sup>clvii</sup> The teacher-student relationship emphasized character formation alongside intellectual growth through mentorship models.<sup>clviii</sup> This holistic approach created well-rounded individuals capable of meaningful contribution to society.<sup>clix</sup>

Contemporary educational institutions can adapt these proven techniques to modern contexts.<sup>clx</sup> The systematic approach of the Nyaya school provides structured methods for critical thinking that enhance analytical capabilities.<sup>clxi</sup> Buddhist logical principles offer valuable insights into causal analysis and inference that complement Western logical frameworks.<sup>clxii</sup> These techniques can enhance students' reasoning abilities across multiple disciplines through interdisciplinary applications.<sup>clxiii</sup>

The ancient Indian emphasis on respectful disagreement provides valuable models for contemporary debate culture.<sup>clxiv</sup> Students learn to engage with opposing viewpoints constructively rather than dismissively.<sup>clxv</sup> This approach prevents the polarization that characterizes much contemporary discourse in academic and public spheres.<sup>clxvi</sup> The focus on understanding rather than victory creates more collaborative learning environments that foster intellectual growth.<sup>clxvii</sup>

Educational curricula can adopt these tried and seasoned techniques through systematic implementation.<sup>clxviii</sup> The sixteen categories of Nyaya enquiries offer comprehensive sufficient guidance for evaluating interdisciplinary knowledge claims.<sup>clxix</sup> Buddhist approaches of connecting cause and effect relationship enrich understanding of diverse relationships in scientific and philosophical ecosystems.<sup>clxx</sup> These methods supplement rather than supplant today's logical scholarship, creating holistic educational experiences.<sup>clxxi</sup>

The practical application of these principles demonstrates measurable improvements in student outcomes.<sup>clxxii</sup> Students who engage with ethical reasoning frameworks develop stronger analytical skills and demonstrate improved critical thinking abilities.<sup>clxxiii</sup> The integration of moral considerations with intellectual rigor creates more thoughtful and responsible citizens.<sup>clxxiv</sup> These educational approaches prepare students for meaningful participation in democratic society.<sup>clxxv</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge System fundamentally elevates how we approach Comparative Religions through its affluent frameworks of logic and debate. Ancient Indian texts refused to baptize themselves in religious discourse as matters of blind faith. They were never satisfied with idle talk or argumentation. The Nyaya tradition established epistemological bulwarks that distinguished valid knowledge from hearsay. Buddhist dialectics filtered orthodox assumptions through systematic questioning. Jain philosophy introduced *anekantavada*, acknowledging the possibility of multiple truths coexisting side by side. These traditions provided enough legroom for intellectual variance without religious hostility. This bequest irrigates the roots of contemporary religious studies deeply. They fertilize a ground where Western comparative approaches often emphasized doctrinal differences. Rather, Indian methods paid attention on epistemological processes. These processes never assumed to know. They needed answers to questions as to how do we know what we claim to know? What amounts to valid

proof? Can conflicting standpoints coexist legitimately without pouring cold water on each other? These doubts and the like remain germane today than they were earlier. The vada-jalpa-vitanda taxonomy offered nuanced understanding of debate types. Not all disagreements provide truth-seeking goals. Some debates elucidate understanding while others merely score rhetorical points. This feature matters very much in modern interfaith dialogues.

The ancient Indian emphasis on structured argumentation - thesis, reason, example, application, conclusion - provided methodological thought without dogmatic finale. Debaters could confront warring positions without violating opponents' dignity. Victory was viewed as a result of finer way of thinking rather than the opponent being retarded. The tradition cherished the quest for truth over individual conquest. This philosophical charity shaped intellectual ecosystems where various Hindu schools flourished through coexistence for centuries.

Modern religious studies gain greatly from these ancient insights. They offer alternatives to dual thinking. They prove that pluralism need not mean relativism. Strong convictions can coexist with intellectual humility. Logical depth supplements rather than supplant spiritual inquiry. The Indian Knowledge System proves that reason and faith, logic and devotion, critical analysis and religious obligation ought not be considered as opposed to each other as North and South poles. As religious hostility rages globally, ancient Indian approaches to debate and reasoning provide imperative inputs. They inform how communities holding incompatible beliefs can engage productively and with respect. This is not merely historical oddity. It is sensible wisdom that the world needs today more than tomorrow.

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## 5.

# Dharma as the Root of Justice: A Study of Indian Knowledge Traditions and Modern Law<sup>1</sup>

**Dr. Kaneez Fatima**

*Assistant Professor*

*Faculty of Juridical Sciences*

*Rama University, Kanpur*

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### **Abstract**

*“Religion is considered the highest philosophy of human existence.” It discusses man's behaviour, thoughts, obligations and his relation with Dharma. Indian natural laws and ethos, which form the basis of social welfare and find their ultimate purpose in it, are closest to Dharma. It encompasses everything that is moral, just and true. It has its roots in the Vedas, an idea that has existed for ages. The Vedas, the most ancient repository of knowledge in Indian culture, are the most reliable sources of information that support humanity in all aspects of life.*

*The Shrutis, Smritis, commentaries and related works effectively replicate this Vedic knowledge in various fields including spirituality, culture, philosophy, arts, aesthetics, commerce, management, human health, law, physics, etc. This Vedic information is usefully replicated in various disciplines of knowledge. Moreover, the two major pillars of ancient knowledge, Apara and Para Vaidya, together represent the core and original form of the Indian tradition. This Vedic knowledge, as rich as the Vedic tradition and literature, is the real scientific knowledge for social transformation, individual enlightenment and healthy state governance. According to Gautama Dharmasutra, Dharma and tradition originate from the Vedas. Yet, the Sanskrit word “dharma”, which is the same as “law”, is not exactly the same. The word ‘dharma’ resists any attempt at a clear interpretation in English or any other language. Ordinances, traditions, duties, rights, justice, morality, virtue, dharma, good deeds etc. are only a few of its many varied meanings. For this endeavour, “dharma” is defined as the norms or guidelines established for the responsibilities, rights and privileges of an individual as well as the standards of his conduct and behaviour as a member of a community. It is important to note that the Narada and Brihaspati Smritis separate law from religion and morality and deal only with law, especially civil law.*

**Keywords:** *Regveda, Smritis, Sabha, Sanhita, Dharmasutra, Law, Spirituality, Culture, Vedas.*

## **Introduction**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a holistic philosophy that encompasses religion, justice, spirituality and social order. In ancient India, 'law' was not just a command to be enforced by the state, but a deeply moral and spiritual order called Dharma. Justice and discipline were established in society through Vedic principles such as Dharma, Rta (Ṛta), Satya and Karma. While the modern system is based on divine punishments and punishments, in the Vedic system, Dharma was based on self-discipline, dharma, and cosmic balance. This chapter analyses the concept of "law" contained in the Vedas from the perspective of Dharma, Justice and Spirituality. The aim is to understand how Vedic knowledge and philosophy guided not only social order but also spiritual self-realization. Justice and law are fundamentally related with the ethos and customs of Indian culture. Since the Vedic period, the Indian knowledge tradition has considered justice and law essential for establishing balance in society, shastra and dharma. The principles contained in the Vedas not only provide religious and spiritual guidance, but also clearly state social order, principles and authority.

In Vedic view, justice is not limited to punishment or law, but it arises from the coordination of Dharma (duty), Rta (universal truth) and Satyam (truth). Here Dharma does not mean only religious rituals, but social and personal rituals. The aim of law and justice in the Indian tradition is the establishment of harmony, peace and welfare in society. Spirituality is also a principle of this approach, in which the inner development and self-knowledge of the individual has been considered important in the process of justice. Thus, in the Vedic tradition, justice, law, religion and spirituality – all these are related and are traditions of Indian society. In this chapter we will analyse justice and law in the light of Vedic texts, Upanishads and Smritis, and try to understand the Indian knowledge tradition has very beautifully established the organization of integrity and law with religion or spirituality.

## **Meaning of Dharma**

The concept of Dharma, which deals with responsibility, righteousness, and the inseparable quality of an object or order—that is, the virtue of a righteous person—is based on the above prayer in its most basic and succinct form. Dharma is a Sanskrit term that comes from the root 'dhr' and literally means 'that which holds or upholds'. The Greek word ethos has its semantic counterpart in dharma. For Indians, religion is natural law, this is the Vedic tradition and it is believed that religion is synonymous with natural law. However, his view was broader and has been appreciated by many eminent personalities including Max Muller. Contrary to popular belief, dharma is a comprehensive set of principles and ideas that include religious rights, duties and norms of conduct. It does not refer to or endorse any particular religion. While discussing religious rights or obligations, this

discourse presents them in such a way that they apply to all religions, without giving preference to one over the other.

Jaimini has defined dharma as "that which is conducive to the welfare of society and prescribed by the great Vedas". According to Justice M. Rama Jois, Dharma is that "which ensures the progress and well-being of all human beings in this world and leads to perpetual heaven in the next. "Dharma is professed as a knowledge." The Mahabharata also discourses the issue of the meaning of dharma. In the words of Madhvacharya, "It is so tedious to define or describe Dharma. According to scholars, Dharma is that which leads living beings towards progress, i.e. that which ensures the welfare of a person. Scholars have said that Dharma is that which supports others and provides shelter to their hopes."

Ancient people's lives were governed by dharma, which is mostly based on the Vedas and contains numerous indices such as Shruti, Smritis, and moral code (virtue). According to Dugit, "The only right which any individual can have is the right to do his duty."<sup>1</sup> In ancient times, religion was a legal system based on the actions of individuals, in which every person had duties towards other individuals according to the actions done by him and had responsibilities to fulfill them. Unlike the modern legal system, which emphasizes rights rather than duties, his theory of social harmony emphasized that even the sovereign or the state has no special status or privileges, and its legitimacy is maintained only as long as it performs its duties. This status or privileges and its existence are justified only as long as it performs its duties.<sup>1</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the existing legal system, which outlines rights rather than obligations.

### **Origin of Religion**

As the narration of what is heard from the ancient priests, who are Sruti, the Vedas are the ultimate source of knowledge for humans and are the origin of Dharma. They contain narration on everything from politics and the military to the everyday lives of ordinary people. Smriti, which is the explanation of Vedas, is additional sources of interpretation of Vedas. Four advisors, known as Smritikars, have been planned of the dharmasastras. They are: "Manu" "Yagnavalkay" "Brihaspati" "Narada" stands in stark contrast to the existing legal system, which outlines rights rather than obligations. The other source has been the Puranas, which are eighteen in number and include thorough descriptions of yugas as well as information regarding the creation and dynasties of gods sages to king.

There is a verse from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, "Punyo Vai Punyen Karmana Bhavati, Papah Papaneti,"<sup>1</sup> which is the meaning of "every person becomes good by means of good deeds and bad by means of bad deeds"—that mean is, "Each person reaps what they sows" – This statement can be practiced to

explain the idea that motivated people to maintain religion. " Dharma defines what is good.

### **Vedic ideology of religion**

The Vedic ideology of religion is very broad and profound. In the Vedas, the word 'dharma' has been used not only for religious faith, but as a comprehensive social and universal rule. It was religion that worked to maintain a balance between the individual, society, nature and God. In the Vedic texts, religion does not mean only religious rituals, worship or sect, but the entire life system, religion, duty and natural-social balance. According to scholars, Dharma is that which leads living beings towards progress, i.e. ensures the welfare of a person. Scholars have said that Dharma is that which supports others and provides shelter to their hopes<sup>1</sup>. Dharma means to hold or maintain. The word is derived from Sanskrit and means to maintain law and harmony in society and to govern them in a manner that promotes morality and ethics. On an individual level, it means to follow one's duty, set a clear direction in life, and live in harmony with oneself and others.

The notion of dharma is deeply entrenched in most philosophies, religious conviction, and yoga. Being ancient, it has evolved through diverse traditional, historical, religious, and philosophical interpretations. Its use is so ingrained in daily life that even a beggar can resort to the words "do dharma" (righteous deeds). In the Mahabharata, Vyasa encapsulates his philosophy in the idea of dharma, urging individuals to follow their duties, and stressing that nature favors those who live their lives in accordance with it. The Bhagavad Gita—considered the essence of the Mahabharata—begins with the words “Dharma Kshetra” (field of righteousness) and ends with the synonym of Dharma. Under this, selfless action (karma), devotion (bhakti) and the path of higher knowledge (jnana) are all included in Dharma<sup>1</sup>.

The teachings of the Buddha also center on this principle, as reflected in the Dhammapada—where Dhamma (the Pali word for Dharma) represents righteousness and Pada symbolizes the path of perfection. It emphasizes awareness, meditation, ethical living and virtue as ways of practicing Dharma.<sup>1</sup>

The Samkhya Karika states that a person with a steady, sattvic mind is able to follow his Dharma. The commentary on the Yoga Sutras (1.2) mentions that Dharma is the basis of energy, faith, commitment, determination and devotion, which ultimately lead a person to knowledge, prosperity and detachment. Therefore, Dharma arises as the foundation of divine practice. For the householder, it provides the path to spiritual development through the constant practice of duty and virtuous living.

## **Rita (Rta): The root of religion**

The Rig Veda defines the essential root of dharma as Rta. The term Rta is resulting from Sanskrit derivation ri, sense "to move." It signifies the lively opinion of universe—which interchanges, evolves, and works rendering to godly law. Frequently interpreted as "natural law," Rta is a major Vedic lawful and ethical notion. Vedic thinkers, who were deeply influenced by natural phenomena such as the sun, moon, rain, and storms, recognized and articulated this universal order long before similar ideas emerged in Greek or Roman thought. Essentially, Rta provides the sense that the universe is an inherently harmonious system—an eternal, self-sustaining structure of life and environment. It reflects the "cosmic melody" of universal order, including the laws that govern all observable phenomena. From this perspective, rta is the manifestation of the cosmic intelligence in action, whether in creation, preservation, or dissolution. Vedic scholars associated rta with peace and discipline, regarding it as the basis of moral rules and a guide to the fulfillment of life's purpose.

The Vedic sages personified fundamental natural forces and appointed deities as their representatives—such as Mitra (the guardian of the bright sky and day), Varuna (the lord of the evening and the sky), and Surya (the Sun). Of these, Varuna was particularly revered as the guardian of rta, the symbol of justice, morality, and righteousness. In the Vedic repetitions, he is admired as the heavenly protector of cosmic and ethical instruction. Therefore, rta is defined as the core and necessary law of nature (Rigveda 4.24.8-9)—the supervisory opinion for mortality and the supporting power of the physical universe. It administers the natural rules of natal, development, falloff and rejuvenation (Rig Veda 2.28.4). All the elemental forces of the environment function under its balance and regulation. Beyond its physical dimension, Rta also has ethical significance, serving as the standard of morality and righteousness in the Vedic worldview.

### **Rig Veda 10.190.1:**

**“ऋतां च सत्यां च भीष्मात् तौ ऽध्याजायत”**

(Rita and truth arose from tapa; the whole universe was created from initiation.)  
(singh, January 2024)

Following the Rita was 'dharma', and those who went against this order were adharmas. Thus, dharma was not just following the law, but was also a moral and spiritual responsibility.

Vedas are the basic source of Dharma: According to Maharishi Manu **“Vedo'khilo Dharmamoolam”**<sup>1</sup>—that is, Vedas are the basic foundation of Dharma.

**Broadness** - Dharma does not mean only worship or sect, but truth, morality, conduct, duty, and welfare of society.

**Natural and moral order** - Dharma is the principle that maintains the order inherent in nature and human life and inspires conduct accordingly.

**For society and individual** - Dharma aims at the advancement, growth and prevention of harm to all beings.

**Four Purusharthas** - Vedic Dharma recognises four Purusharthas of life—Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha<sup>1</sup>—with Dharma having the highest place. Thus, Vedic Dharma is a universal, ethical and social system, aimed at establishing balance, justice and welfare in the individual, society and creation<sup>1</sup>.

### **Types of Dharma – Individual, Social, Global**

In the Vedas, Dharma is not considered as individual duty only, but it is reiterated in four parts<sup>1</sup>:

- Swadharma – spiritual and moral conduct of the individual
- Rajadharma – accountability of the autonomous, morality and fortification
- Apaddharma – disaster condition in a certain dharma
- Samaana Dharma – truth, non-violence, kindness, restraint etc<sup>1</sup>.

In the Vedas, “Dharma” does not mean merely religious conduct but a wide-ranging, social and ethical system, which establishes a balance between the individual, society and nature. Its basic foundation is “Rta” – a universal principle which embodies truth, law and natural discipline (Radhakrishnan, 1953). In the Rig Veda, it is considered to be the power from which the gods, the sun, the earth and the entire creation have been created. Dharma, faithful to this Rta, follows the virtues of truth, non-violence, asceticism, mercy and restraint<sup>1</sup>. which were the basic pillars of the code of conduct and justice system in the Vedic society. Essentially Vedic Dharma was not just a spiritual practice, but a life-ideal that today's modern "law" fulfills the soul from a spiritual and moral point of view<sup>1</sup>.

### **Vedic Concepts of King, Justice and Punishment**

The Vedas deliberate the raja is not just as political leader but as corporeal representative of Dharma. His main duty was to protect Dharma, to look after the subjects and to establish justice based on truth. Rendering to Vedas, the raja was measured to the representative of will of God, by this means creating the statutory law of Rta (cosmic instruction) or Dharma. The Atharva veda evidently situations – “Raja Dharmen Palayet Prajah”<sup>1</sup>(3.4.2), that is to say, the raja must be look after the focusses rendering to Dharma. This policy was not only a political but also a spiritual obligation.

The king had the duty to maintain balance, justice and social harmony among the subjects. The main concept of Rajadharma involved the king dispensing justice on the basis of Dharmashastra, folk custom and the advice of the sages (Kane, 1962)<sup>1</sup>. This decision process was not a disciplinary one. Rig Veda (10.85.26) mentions demons like "Sabha" and "Samiti"<sup>1</sup> which are institutions of justice and policy-making. Sabha consisted of scholars, sages and justice representatives of the public, where discussions were held on the king. This was a kind of people-based

justice system, which was the ancestor of today's "Lok Adalat" or "Panchayati Nyaya".

As far as punishment is concerned, in the Vedas punishment is not seen merely from a symbolic or retaliatory point of view, but as a moral and reformative means. In Yajur Veda (20.9) punishment is said to be an aid to Dharma - "Dandam Dharmasya Palayita"<sup>1</sup>, that is, punishment is the protector of Dharma. The purpose of punishment was not to torture the criminal, but to bring him back to the path of Dharma. Basically it is a primitive form of rehabilitative (reformative) justice. Crime was seen as adharma, and punishment as its redressal.

The king was also instructed not to misbehave, get angry or covet. Justice was not the only principle followed, but moral judgment was also made from conscience. In the Upanishads and Dharmashastras, justice is linked to asceticism, restraint and tolerance. Where the king is unrighteous and sinful, the end of his citizens is sure. Thus, in the Vedic justice system, a triangular balance was established between the king, dharma and the subjects. Justice, not simple lawful procedure, was a divine duty, just means of divine and ethical raise of both individual and society. This methodology provides a cavernous ethical and divine core to the jurisprudence of nowadays<sup>1</sup>.

### **Sovereign and Administration of Justice**

In the Vedas, the king is not only considered the patron of state power, but also the living symbol of Dharma and the protector of justice. The king's duty was not only to rule, but also to stabilize the social order according to Rta (cosmic truth), Dharma (ethical conduct), and Nyaya (judicial balance). In the Atharva Veda (3.4.2) there is a clear instruction - "Raja Dharmen Palayet Prajah"<sup>1</sup>, that is, the king should rule the people according to Dharma. This instruction states that the duty of the Vedic king was not limited to the use of power, but he was also a moral and leader.

Many east coasts are given in the Vedas regarding the role of the king. First of all, he should have knowledge of the scriptures and Brahmagyana, so that he can give decisions on the basis of truth and Rta, not just on the basis of ineffectiveness at the right time. This duty is named "Rajadharma"- the belief of raja. He conducts a trial, but the purpose of punishment is not revenge, but reformation. In Yajur Veda (20.9)<sup>1</sup> it is clearly stated about the king and punishment – "Dandam Dharmasya Palayita", i.e. punishment is the protector of religion. This makes it clear that through Vedic penal policy, an attempt was not made only to end crime, but it was a tool to restore balance and moral values in the society<sup>1</sup>. The king's justice system did not have only a priest. Rig Veda(10.85.26) mentions the settlers like "Sabha" and "Samiti",<sup>1</sup> through which public representatives and scholars participated in religious discussions. These institutions were the early forms of Vedic democratic

system, where decisions were taken by collective deliberation. Sabha was a type of historical council, while Samiti was helpful in policy making. Through these principles, the king was inspired to work according to Loksangraha (public interest). In addition, the king was required to be free from passion, hatred, attachment and greed while dispensing justice. The purpose of justice was to maintain social balance, protect truth, and protect the people from adharma. If the king deviates from dharma, anarchy spreads in society and the page gets spoiled. Manusmriti states – “If the king is destructive of dharma, the destruction of the subjects is certain”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in the Vedic justice system, the king was not just the head of a social institution, but also a religious, moral and spiritual guide. This principle has deep roots in the ethics of today's constitutional rulers. This principle is deeply embedded in the conduct and thinking of today's constitutional rulers. Because they protected the social command by relating to the religion or justice.

### **Vedic Punishment and the Principle of Rehabilitation**

In the ancient Indian Vedic system, punishment (sajja) is not seen as a mere means of power or retribution, but as a religious and moral tool. The purpose of punishment in the Vedas and Dharmashastras is not just the control of crime in society, but the protection of Dharma, spiritual reformation, social restoration and awakening of conscience of the criminal. The Punishment Policy establishes the Indian justice system as something that has been far more holistic and sensitive than the restorative approach of modern jurisprudence.

#### **1. The Dharma-based purpose of punishment**

The Yajur Veda (20.9) states that “Dharma is the protector of Dharma”<sup>1</sup> -

**“Dandam Dharmasya Palayita” - that is, punishment is the protector of Dharma.**

This instruction states that punishment was not just a tool of law, but a means of maintaining the teachings of Dharma. If crime is adharma, then punishment is its correction - this is the Vedic idea. In the Vedic period, it was believed that every crime is against the cosmic balance (rita), and is a means of balancing the balance.

#### **2. Corrective nature of punishment**

Punishments in the Vedas are seen as restorative (reformatory) in nature. The goal of punishment was not just retribution, but to develop self-awareness, moral confidence and the possibility of re-entry into society in the criminals. Purity, self-purification and forgiveness are mentioned at many places in the Rigveda, which are the remnants of non-violence and forgiveness in Vedic society. According to this, if the criminal is ashamed of his act, then there is an acceptance of humanity even in the recognition of punishment<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. Concept of crime

In Vedic scriptures, crime was not just an act against the social order, but a religious aberration. It is divided into two places:

- **Physical crime** - which is against the state, society or the individual (such as murder, theft, lying).
- **Misuse of spirituality**- such as providing deceptive teachings, forcing a renunciation of religion, or forcing loyalty to a spiritual master.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of punishment in both the sampradayas was spiritual and social purification. While modern scriptures view crime mostly as a legal violation, Vedic view sees crime as a form of adharma, and punishment as a tool for reestablishing dharma.

### 4. Types of punishment

The Dharmashastras (especially Manusmriti, Yagnavalkya Smriti etc.) mention various types of punishments:

- Mental punishments - like preaching, yagna etc
- Economic punishments - like penal amount (dandadhan), danda
- Physical punishments - like desh vidhi, negligence or upbringing
- Social punishments - like boycott, fasting, atonement<sup>1</sup>

In these too, institutional mental and economic punishments were given. Severe punishment was the last resort. Where punishment was determined based on the status of the offender, the nature of the crime and its social impact.

### 5. Kautilya's Punishment Policy

Governance has been considered the central element in Kautilya's Arthshastra. Kautilya clarified that the meaning of punishment should be according to discretion, religion and law."Dandah Shastra Samhitaah Prajayaah Shanti Rakshanay Bhavati" - that is, the people can be protected only by Shastra Samhita.<sup>1</sup> Kautilya was of the opinion that the king should be given opportunities for empires. If the criminal is given harsh punishment without understanding, then it is not only a violation of justice, but also creates unrest in the society.

### 6. Sattvikta and caution

In the Vedas and Smritis, attaining dissatisfaction is considered a grave sin. At the time of justice, the king should be free from passion, hatred, attachment and greed - this instruction is repeated again and again. Manu Smriti (8.118) states:<sup>1</sup>

“Na raja dharmakamastu lobhadhyaharet kvachit” - meaning a king should never dispense justice influenced by greed or prejudice. This idea is similar to today's legal constructions, in which architecture is of supreme value.

### 7. Vedic influence in modern jurisprudence

Reformative penal theory is also being given prominence in modern Indian jurisprudence today - such as reform homes, juvenile justice boards, counselling

based punishment, etc. This system emphasizes reformation more than retribution. The Vedic theory that the offender has not only guilt but a reconstructable personal identity is the spiritual presupposition of today's legal reforms<sup>1</sup>.

### **Influence of Vedic Principles on Modern Judicial System**

The modern judicial system of India, though developed under British colonial rule, has its roots deeply embedded in the Indian knowledge tradition, particularly Vedic philosophy, theology and principles of justice. The direct and indirect influence of ancient Vedic principles of justice can be clearly seen on modern constitutional law, concept of human rights, criminal policy and judicial process. Dharma is the existence of Sanatana, or eternal values that are not limited by place or time. The thought of Dharma has been existent since the foundation of time<sup>1</sup>. While Dharma and Dharmas are interchanged<sup>1</sup>, they are frequently confused and used swapping. In *A.S. Narayana Dikshitulu v. State of Andhra Pradesh and others*<sup>1</sup>, as mentioned earlier, Justice J. Hansaria cited Swami Rama's book "Calling to Mankind" (singh, January 2024) and gave the following interpretation:

Dharma thrives in the field of direct experience, but it also draws strength from theology and visionary perspectives. Dharma enhances the beauty of spirituality and contributes to the changing stages of civilization. Dharma makes one see the eternal shrine situated in the heart and can inspire one to build a mortal, perishable house for God<sup>1</sup>. The fact that the king was subordinate to Dharma, and not above it, makes clear the supremacy of Dharma. Had the king been subordinate to Dharma, the subjects would have had the right to overthrow such an unjust, tyrannical and immoral ruler or government. In the interest of the larger community, the treaties of Manu, Kautilya and others lay down various duties and rights for both the king and his subjects, while also recognizing individual rights such as private property and personal wealth.

### **Evolving 'Concept of Dharma' in Modern Era**

In the present day, the idea of dharma has undergone tremendous change, transcending its historical origins as a system of ceremonial or caste-based responsibilities. Hinduism has traditionally used the term "dharma" to refer to the moral and religious rules that govern people's behaviour. These rules include both general responsibilities (sadharna dharma), such as being truthful and not hurting others, and specialised duties (svadharma)<sup>1</sup>, which are determined by a person's social role and stage of life. Dharma has evolved into a more comprehensive ethical and social framework that adjusts to shifting society ideals and issues, particularly in the twenty-first century.

Instead of focussing only on ceremonial attendance, contemporary interpretations of dharma highlight its function as a principle of justice, social responsibility, and ethical action. For instance, in order to preserve social fairness and constitutional

morality, the Indian judiciary has invoked the spirit of dharma in significant instances. In the case of *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* the Supreme Court of India held that justice, equality and protection of fundamental rights are modern manifestations of religion.<sup>1</sup> The judgment called religion the cornerstone of the essential structure of the Indian Constitution. In a same vein, courts have cited dharma in environmental jurisprudence as the necessity of protecting the environment and ensuring equality for all generations.

In the case of *M.C. Mehta vs Union of India*,<sup>1</sup> it was clarified that, because the right to a clean environment was linked to the age-old religious principle of living in harmony with nature, courts have also invoked religion in environmental jurisprudence as an obligation to preserve nature and guarantee inter-generational equity. In present times the concept of Dharma or Dharm has been used by various courts to help decide various disputed cases, even by the Supreme Court in many cases. One of the important cases is *Shri A.S. Narayana Dikshitulu vs. State of Andhra Pradesh and others*,<sup>1</sup> which thoroughly addresses all of the topics surrounding Dharma, including “What is Dharma?” and “Are Dharma and Religion the same?” As previously said, Dharm is not the same as Dharma.

As shown in the case of *Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting vs. Cricket Association of Bengal and Ors*<sup>1</sup>, dharma still regulates the law through morality both inside and outside of the courts. The Court discusses the Constitution's Dharma and the adjudication responsibility in *Dattatreya Govind Mahajan vs. State of Maharashtra*<sup>1</sup>. In addition to being utilised in place of and as an equivalent to duty and truth, dharma has been deemed iconic by courts such as the constitutional benches<sup>1</sup>. Ashoka's Dharma Chakra is also inscribed on flag<sup>1</sup>. Although it is not the traditional view, courts have interpreted Articles 25 and 26 in the context of religion, and have held that religion, when read within these provisions, reflects a belief that co-exists in harmony with the welfare of others.<sup>1</sup> As previously mentioned, the concept of Dharma has been thoroughly examined in *Narayana Dikshitulu v. State of Andhra Pradesh and others*<sup>1</sup>. A comparison between constitutional laws and Raja Dharma has been made, and various verses from various sources have been used to try and clarify what Dharma is. Its illustration is, " In the Raj, religion was understood to mean law, and was considered secular –that is supremely secular. To date, every court has adopted this stance. Human rights and fundamental rights are inspired by religion and there is clear evidence of this in the *Rigveda*<sup>1</sup>. These days, discussions on social change, gender equality, and moral leadership also bring up dharma. The Supreme Court's decision to decriminalise homosexuality in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*<sup>1</sup>, for example, was supported by the principles of nondiscrimination and human dignity, which is consistent with the growing idea of dharma as preserving justice and compassion for everyone.

## Conclusion

Indian intellectual traditions, especially the Vedas, Smritis, and their associated philosophical works, consider dharma as a fundamental principle of justice. Analysis shows that in the Vedic world, law was not simply considered a state-enforced order, but a moral, ethical, and cosmic order based on *rita*. Justice, governance, and punishment were based on balance, well-being, and moral restoration, rather than mere punishment. This suggests that key concepts such as *rajdharmā*, corrective punishment, and duty-based accountability have had a distinct impact on today's Indian constitutional ideals, judicial reasoning, and human rights discourse. Dharma, as described in ancient literature, emerged under specific historical, social, and cultural conditions. Some of these included hierarchical social structures and role-based duties that may conflict with today's ideals of equality, individual freedom, and secular governance. Some Smriti traditions distanced law from dharma and morality, especially in the case of civil law. This means that even in ancient texts, the link between religion and law was neither uniform nor uncontroversial. Recognizing these meanings is crucial to preventing the casual adoption or misuse of old standards in today's legal system. From a normative perspective, this study does not advocate subordinating modern law to religion or eliminating constitutional secularism. Rather, it promotes the idea that religion should be viewed as a moral repository that offers normative advice rather than a binding authority. Its continued importance stems from its emphasis on responsibility, prevention, moral accountability, and social interaction—principles that can complement, but cannot replace, a rights-based legal system. Modern law, based on reason, codification, and institutional enforcement, must maintain its autonomy while remaining open to ethical considerations that place justice above procedural legal considerations. The report offers several specific suggestions for current law and policy.

**First**, Indian knowledge traditions should be seriously and comparatively incorporated into legal education so that legal professionals can interact with indigenous ethical frameworks without abandoning constitutional ideals.

**Second**, a focus on reform and reform can be incorporated into criminal justice policy, especially in areas such as victim-offender reconciliation, juvenile justice, and sentencing reform.

**Third**, by firmly integrating such thinking into constitutional texts and principles, constitutional and environmental jurisprudence can continue to utilize the ethical aspects of dharma, such as intergenerational responsibility and harmony with nature.

**Finally**, reviving the spirit of *rajdharmā* as the moral accountability of authority can improve transparency, duty, and service to the public good. Public governance can benefit from reviving the spirit of *rajdharmā*, promoting the moral accountability of authority, transparency, responsibility, and service to the public. The conclusion is that revitalizing Indian knowledge systems is a cultural

imperative and a way to achieve sustainable development based on traditional knowledge. We can use the enduring lessons of India's cultural heritage to address current issues and promote holistic well-being at individual, societal, and global levels by fostering cooperative research and interdisciplinary dialogue. This collaborative research proposal calls on stakeholders from various backgrounds to work together to preserve and promote India's rich knowledge base, in an effort to accelerate efforts toward this monumental endeavor.

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### **Brief Profile:**

#### **Dr. Kaneez Fatima**

*Assistant Professor*

*B.A., M.A., L.L.B., L.L.M., Ph.D., NET Qualified*

*Contact No.- 6393024514*

*Email ID- kaneez.fjs@ramauniversity.ac.in*

*Faculty of Judicial Sciences, Rama University*

**I am Dr. Kaneez Fatima, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Judicial Sciences, Rama University. I hold degrees in Arts and Law, including a Masters in Criminal Law (LLM) and a Doctorate in Law (PhD). I am also a UGC-NET qualified scholar. I have a keen academic interest in constitutional law, jurisprudence and the interrelationship between Indian knowledge traditions and modern legal systems. I have been actively engaged in teaching, research and academic writing and have contributed to contemporary legal discourse through publications and participation in conferences.**

## 6.

# Dharmic Management: Reimagining Organizational Excellence Through Ancient Indian Wisdom

**Dr. Pritha Chaturvedi**

Associate Professor, ICFAI University Jharkhand Email:  
prithachaturvedi@iujharkhand.edu.in

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### Abstract

*In an era where conventional management paradigms struggle to address complex organizational challenges, the ancient Indian concept of 'Dharma' emerges as a transformative framework for reimagining organizational excellence. This chapter explores how Dharmic Management - the integration of righteous principles from Indian Knowledge Systems with contemporary business practices - offers a revolutionary approach to sustainable organizational success that transcends mere profit maximization to encompass holistic stakeholder welfare and ethical excellence.*

*Drawing from the profound wisdom embedded in classical Indian texts like the Arthashastra, Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, and various Upanishads, this research demonstrates how Dharmic Management principles can revolutionize modern organizational behaviour. The Arthashastra's sophisticated frameworks for governance, resource optimization, and strategic planning find remarkable resonance with contemporary corporate governance challenges. Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita's discourse on duty-based leadership (Svadharm) and detached action (Nishkama Karma) provides innovative solutions for executive decision-making and employee motivation in today's complex business environment.*

*The research extensively examines how Dharmic Management transcends traditional Western management theories through its emphasis on righteousness, harmony, and collective prosperity. Key concepts include 'Rajdharm' (the duty of organizational leaders to govern justly), 'Seva-Bhava' (service-oriented mindset that transforms customer relations), and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world as one family, promoting inclusive stakeholder engagement). Through comprehensive case study analysis of leading Indian corporations like Tata Group, Infosys, and Patanjali, the chapter demonstrates the practical implementation and measurable success of Dharmic Management principles, contributing significantly to the emerging field of indigenous management studies.*

**Keywords:** Dharmic Management, Organizational Excellence, Indian Knowledge Systems, Ethical Leadership, Sustainable Business Practices.

## **1. Introduction: The Dharmic Paradigm in Modern Management**

The twenty-first century has witnessed unprecedented complexity in organizational management, characterized by rapid technological disruption, environmental crises, ethical scandals, and the erosion of stakeholder trust. Contemporary management theories, predominantly rooted in Western capitalist frameworks, increasingly demonstrate limitations in addressing these multifaceted challenges. The exclusive focus on shareholder value maximization, short-term profitability, and competitive aggression has created organizations that, while financially successful, often contribute to social inequality, environmental degradation, and employee alienation.

Against this backdrop, the ancient Indian concept of 'Dharma' offers a compelling alternative paradigm for organizational excellence. Dharma, often inadequately translated as 'righteousness' or 'duty,' represents a comprehensive philosophical framework that encompasses ethical conduct, social responsibility, cosmic order, and individual purpose. When applied to organizational contexts, Dharmic Management transcends the narrow confines of profit maximization to embrace holistic stakeholder welfare, environmental stewardship, and sustainable prosperity.

### **Defining Dharmic Management and Its Contemporary Relevance**

Dharmic Management can be defined as an integrated approach to organizational leadership and governance that draws upon the philosophical, ethical, and practical wisdom embedded in ancient Indian texts and traditions. This approach is fundamentally characterized by several distinguishing features. First, it emphasizes righteousness and ethical conduct as non-negotiable foundations of all organizational activities. Second, it adopts a stakeholder-centric orientation that recognizes the interdependence of all organizational constituents including employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and the natural environment. Third, it promotes long-term sustainable value creation over short-term financial gains.

The relevance of Dharmic Management in contemporary contexts stems from its unique capacity to address several critical challenges facing modern organizations. In an era of widespread corporate scandals and ethical failures, Dharmic principles provide robust frameworks for building organizational cultures rooted in integrity and transparency. As environmental sustainability becomes imperative for corporate survival, the Dharmic emphasis on harmony with nature offers practical guidance for sustainable business practices. In contexts of increasing employee disengagement and burnout, Dharmic concepts of meaningful work and individual purpose provide solutions for human capital excellence.

## **The Crisis of Conventional Management Theories**

Contemporary management thought faces several fundamental crises that question its continued adequacy. The first crisis is ethical in nature. The repeated occurrence of corporate scandals reveals fundamental flaws in management systems that prioritize financial performance while marginalizing ethical considerations. Traditional agency theory has proven insufficient in cultivating genuine ethical commitment within organizations.

The second crisis is environmental. The escalating climate emergency and resource depletion demonstrate that conventional business models, predicated upon unlimited growth and resource exploitation, are fundamentally unsustainable. While concepts like corporate social responsibility have emerged as responses, these often remain peripheral to core business strategies.

The third crisis concerns human welfare and fulfillment. Despite decades of research on employee motivation and engagement, contemporary workplaces increasingly face challenges of burnout, meaninglessness, and alienation. The mechanistic view of human beings as 'resources' to be optimized (Barney, 1991; Wright & McMahan, 1992) has created organizations that succeed financially while failing humanly." These crises collectively point toward the need for alternative management paradigms that integrate ethical foundations, environmental consciousness, and human fulfillment into the very essence of organizational purpose. Dharmic Management offers such an alternative paradigm that is both timeless in its philosophical depth and timely in its practical applicability.

## **2. Philosophical Foundations of Dharmic Management**

The philosophical foundations of Dharmic Management rest upon the sophisticated intellectual traditions preserved in classical Indian texts spanning over three millennia. These texts contain profound insights into human psychology, organizational dynamics, leadership ethics, and strategic thinking that remain remarkably relevant to contemporary management challenges.

### **Core Principles from Arthashastra, Bhagavad Gita, and Upanishads**

The Arthashastra, composed by Kautilya around the fourth century BCE, represents one of the most comprehensive treatises on statecraft, economic policy, and organizational management in world literature. Central to the Arthashastra's management philosophy is the concept of 'Rajdharma' – the dharma or duty of rulers and organizational leaders. Kautilya emphasizes that the primary duty of leaders is the welfare of their subjects, stating that "the happiness of the people is the happiness of the king, their welfare is his welfare." This principle fundamentally challenges the modern corporate tendency to prioritize shareholder interests above all other stakeholders. The Arthashastra also provides detailed

guidance on administrative efficiency, corruption prevention, performance evaluation, and organizational structure. The Bhagavad Gita, composed between the fifth and second centuries BCE, offers several revolutionary concepts that challenge conventional Western management thought. The principle of 'Nishkama Karma' or desireless action emphasizes performing one's duties with full commitment while remaining detached from the fruits or outcomes of action. In organizational contexts, this principle addresses the problematic tendency toward result-obsession, which often leads to unethical shortcuts and unsustainable practices. Instead, Nishkama Karma promotes process excellence, ethical integrity in means regardless of ends, and psychological equanimity in face of success or failure.

The concept of 'Svadharmā' or individual dharma represents another crucial contribution of the Gita. Svadharmā refers to the unique duty or purpose of each individual based on their inherent nature and capabilities. The Gita emphasizes that it is better to perform one's own dharma imperfectly than to perfectly perform another's dharma. This principle offers profound insights for talent management and organizational role allocation, suggesting that excellence emerges from aligning individual capabilities with organizational requirements.

The Upanishads explore fundamental questions about the nature of reality, consciousness, and human purpose. The concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) promotes a holistic stakeholder orientation that recognizes the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings. This principle challenges the atomistic individualism often assumed in Western management theories and supports more collaborative, inclusive, and community-oriented organizational approaches. The Upanishadic principle of 'Satyam-Shivam-Sundaram' (truth-goodness-beauty) suggests that excellence requires integration of factual truth, ethical goodness, and meaningful purpose.

### **Comparative Analysis with Western Management Frameworks**

Understanding Dharmic Management requires examining its distinctiveness relative to dominant Western management theories. Classical management theory, pioneered by Frederick Taylor's scientific management, emphasized efficiency, standardization, and hierarchical control. While Dharmic Management also values organizational efficiency, it fundamentally differs in its view of human beings and organizational purpose. Where scientific management views workers as components to be optimized (Taylor, 1911; Kanigel, 1997), Dharmic Management recognizes the multidimensional nature of human beings whose fulfillment constitutes a legitimate organizational objective. Modern stakeholder theory, developed by R. Edward Freeman, explicitly recognizes that organizations have responsibilities to multiple constituencies beyond shareholders. This represents significant movement toward the Dharmic perspective. However, stakeholder

theory typically justifies stakeholder consideration on pragmatic grounds of organizational sustainability rather than fundamental ethical grounds. Dharmic Management asserts that organizational responsibilities to stakeholders derive from inherent ethical duties rather than instrumental calculations. "Perhaps the most fundamental difference between Dharmic Management and Western management theories concerns the ultimate purpose of organizational activity. Western theories, even when they embrace stakeholder perspectives, typically view these as constraints upon or complements to the fundamental objective of economic value creation (Friedman, 1970; Jensen, 2002; Porter & Kramer, 2011)". Dharmic Management inverts this priority structure, viewing righteous conduct and stakeholder welfare as the fundamental organizational purpose, with economic performance as a necessary means but not the ultimate end.

### **3. Rajdharma: The Art of Righteous Organizational Leadership**

The concept of Rajdharma provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the duties, responsibilities, and ethical obligations of organizational leaders. While originating in the context of political governance, Rajdharma principles offer profound insights for contemporary corporate leadership.

#### **Duty-Based Leadership Models from Ancient Indian Texts**

The Arthashastra articulates a sophisticated duty-based model of leadership that emphasizes the primacy of welfare responsibilities over personal interests. The duties of leaders according to Rajdharma can be organized into several categories. First, protective duties include ensuring the security and wellbeing of organizational members and safeguarding organizational assets and reputation. Second, promotive duties involve facilitating the growth and development of organizational members and creating conditions for organizational prosperity. Third, justice duties require fair treatment of all organizational constituents and impartial resolution of conflicts. Fourth, exemplary duties demand that leaders personally model the values and behaviors expected of organizational members.

The Mahabharata illustrates various dimensions of Rajdharma through both positive and negative examples. The character of Yudhishtira represents the ideal of Rajdharma in his unwavering commitment to truth and justice even at great personal cost. The Bhagavad Gita's teachings to Arjuna emphasize that leaders must act from a sense of duty rather than personal preference and recognize their role as instruments of larger purposes. The Gita's concept of 'Lokasangraha' (welfare of the world) establishes that leadership actions should be guided by consideration of their impact on the broader social order.

#### **Modern Applications in Executive Decision-Making**

Translating Rajdharma principles into contemporary executive decision-making demonstrates the continuing relevance of these timeless principles. In strategic

decision-making, Rajdharmā offers a framework that transcends the shareholder-stakeholder debate. When executives face decisions with differential impacts on various stakeholders, Rajdharmā provides guidance through its emphasis on duty hierarchy and the principle of non-harm, which establishes that strategies causing unnecessary harm to any stakeholder group cannot be justified even by benefits to others.

Consider a manufacturing company facing the decision to relocate production to a lower-cost jurisdiction. A Rajdharmā-based approach would require comprehensive consideration of duties to all affected parties including current employees, their communities, potential new host communities, and long-term organizational sustainability. This might lead to decisions that balance various considerations such as phased transitions with retraining support and investments in affected communities.

In matters of organizational ethics and compliance, Rajdharmā's emphasis on personal exemplary conduct by leaders provides clear guidance. Rather than viewing ethical compliance as technical adherence to regulations, Rajdharmā establishes that leaders must personally embody the highest ethical standards and create organizational cultures where ethical conduct is intrinsically valued rather than externally enforced.

The concept of 'Danda' (righteous punishment) from the Arthashastra offers guidance for organizational discipline and performance management. Danda is not vindictive punishment but corrective action aimed at protecting organizational order and promoting improvement. Kautilya emphasizes that punishment should be proportionate, impartial, and aimed at correction rather than retribution.

#### **4. Organizational Dharma: Structure, Governance, and Ethical Excellence**

The concept of organizational dharma extends beyond leadership to encompass the fundamental nature, purpose, and structural principles of organizations themselves. Ancient Indian texts demonstrate sophisticated understanding of institutional design and governance systems that remain remarkably relevant to contemporary organizational challenges.

#### **Ancient Indian Principles of Institutional Design**

The Arthashastra presents comprehensive principles for organizational structure and governance. A fundamental principle is functional specialization combined with integrated coordination. The text describes detailed organizational structures with specialized departments for different functions, each with clearly defined responsibilities. However, specialization is balanced with coordination mechanisms to ensure that departmental actions serve broader organizational purposes.

The principle of 'checks and balances' is extensively developed in the Arthashastra's treatment of organizational governance. Kautilya recognizes that concentration of power without accountability creates opportunities for abuse and organizational dysfunction. Therefore, he prescribes systems where different organizational units have oversight responsibilities over each other and where leaders maintain direct channels to various organizational levels.

The concept of 'Mandala' (circle) provides a sophisticated framework for understanding organizational ecosystems and stakeholder relationships. The Mandala theory recognizes that organizations exist within complex networks of relationships including allies, competitors, neutral parties, and adversaries. This systems-thinking approach predates modern stakeholder analysis by millennia.

### **Contemporary Corporate Governance Through Dharmic Lens**

Applying Dharmic principles to contemporary corporate governance addresses current challenges including board effectiveness, executive compensation, stakeholder representation, and accountability mechanisms. Rather than viewing boards primarily as monitors of management on behalf of shareholders, a Dharmic approach conceptualizes boards as guardians of organizational dharma responsible for ensuring that the organization fulfills its duties to all stakeholders.

Executive compensation represents a particularly contentious issue where Dharmic principles offer clear guidance. The extreme disparity between executive and employee compensation in many modern corporations violates principles of proportionality and social harmony emphasized in ancient texts. The Arthashastra advocates that leadership positions should receive compensation reflecting their greater responsibilities but not disparities so extreme as to create social discord.

Transparency and disclosure practices receive strong support from Dharmic principles of truth and accountability. The Arthashastra emphasizes that organizational leaders must maintain comprehensive information systems and must not conceal relevant information from legitimate stakeholders. This principle requires honest disclosure of information relevant to stakeholder assessment of organizational conduct.

### **5. Svadharma and Human Capital Excellence**

The concept of Svadharma offers a revolutionary framework for human capital management that transcends conventional approaches to talent management, performance evaluation, and employee development. By recognizing the unique nature and capabilities of each individual, Svadharma provides guidance for creating organizations where individual fulfillment and organizational effectiveness are mutually reinforcing.

## **Individual Duty and Talent Optimization**

The Bhagavad Gita's discourse on Svadharma begins with a fundamental recognition that individuals differ in their inherent nature, capabilities, inclinations, and life purposes. The Gita states that it is better to perform one's own dharma imperfectly than to perfectly perform another's dharma. This principle challenges several fundamental assumptions underlying conventional human resource management, particularly the standardization paradigm that seeks to mold all employees into uniform competency profiles.

Applying Svadharma principles to talent management begins with deeper understanding of individual natures and capabilities. This requires moving beyond surface-level assessments based on educational credentials to probe fundamental questions about individual inclinations, values, strengths, and developmental potential. Ancient Indian psychology provides sophisticated frameworks for understanding human personality and potential.

The concept of 'Guna' (qualities or modes) from Samkhya philosophy offers one such framework. The three Gunas - Sattva (harmony, wisdom), Rajas (activity, passion), and Tamas (stability, endurance) - combine in varying proportions to create distinctive personality types. Understanding an individual's Guna composition provides insights into appropriate role alignment.

## **Performance Management Through Righteous Principles**

Performance management represents another human capital domain where Dharmic principles offer important innovations. The principle of Nishkama Karma suggests a fundamentally different approach to performance management. Rather than fixating on measured outcomes and creating high-stakes consequences for performance ratings, Nishkama Karma emphasizes cultivating commitment to excellent work processes regardless of immediate results. This approach recognizes that many factors affecting performance outcomes lie beyond individual control, and that obsessive result-focus often leads to unethical shortcuts, gaming behaviors, and psychological stress. Organizations implementing Nishkama Karma principles focus performance evaluations on effort quality, process adherence, ethical conduct, and learning rather than solely on measurable outcomes. This creates cultures of continuous improvement rather than anxiety-driven competition.

The concept of 'Yajna' (sacrifice or contribution) provides another dimension to performance management. Yajna emphasizes that work should be viewed not merely as exchange of labor for compensation but as contribution to collective welfare. Organizations cultivating Yajna consciousness report higher employee engagement, greater willingness to go beyond defined roles, and stronger organizational citizenship behaviors.

## **6. Seva-Bhava: Transforming Stakeholder Relations**

The concept of Seva-Bhava, meaning service-orientation or the attitude of service, offers transformative principles for reimagining relationships between organizations and their various stakeholders including customers, communities, suppliers, and society at large.

### **Service-Oriented Business Models**

Seva-Bhava represents a fundamental reorientation from transactional to relational stakeholder engagement. Rather than viewing customers as revenue sources to be exploited or communities as contexts to be managed, Seva-Bhava establishes that organizational purpose fundamentally involves service to stakeholder welfare. This orientation does not negate the necessity of organizational sustainability and profitability but repositions these as means to enable service rather than ends in themselves.

The principle of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (the guest is divine) from ancient Indian hospitality traditions offers specific guidance for customer relations. This principle establishes that customers deserve treatment reflecting their inherent dignity and worth rather than merely their economic value. Organizations implementing this principle invest in customer service excellence not as marketing strategy but as expression of fundamental respect.

Service-orientation extends beyond customers to encompass all stakeholder relationships. In supplier relations, Seva-Bhava promotes partnerships based on mutual benefit and long-term relationships rather than exploitative practices that extract maximum value from weaker parties. In community relations, it establishes genuine commitment to community welfare rather than superficial corporate social responsibility programs designed primarily for reputation management.

### **Customer and Community Engagement Strategies**

Practical implementation of Seva-Bhava requires specific strategies and practices that embed service-orientation into organizational operations. In customer engagement, this includes empowering frontline employees to make decisions in customer interests, measuring success not merely by sales but by customer wellbeing, and viewing customer complaints as opportunities for service improvement rather than problems to be managed.

In community engagement, Seva-Bhava principles suggest moving beyond philanthropic donations to deep partnerships that address community needs in sustainable ways. This might include preferential hiring from local communities, investments in local infrastructure and education, and genuine consultation on organizational decisions affecting communities. Organizations implementing these principles report stronger community relationships, reduced operational conflicts, and enhanced reputation.

The concept of 'Lokasangraha' (welfare of all beings) extends service-orientation to society and environment. This principle establishes that organizations have responsibilities to contribute to broader social welfare and environmental sustainability beyond their immediate stakeholder circles. Organizations implementing Lokasangraha principles engage in activities such as environmental restoration, social innovation, and policy advocacy for societal benefit.

## **7. Case Studies: Dharmic Management in Practice**

The practical viability of Dharmic Management principles is demonstrated through their successful implementation by leading Indian corporations. These case studies illustrate how ancient wisdom can drive contemporary business excellence while maintaining ethical standards and social responsibility.

### **Tata Group: Institutionalizing Dharmic Principles**

The Tata Group, founded in 1868, represents perhaps the most comprehensive example of Dharmic Management implementation over sustained periods. The organization's founding principles, articulated by Jamsetji Tata and reinforced by successive generations of leadership, explicitly embrace stakeholder welfare, ethical conduct, and social responsibility as fundamental organizational purposes. Tata's commitment to employee welfare predates modern human resource management theories. The organization pioneered eight-hour workdays, provident funds, maternity benefits, and worker housing in Indian industry. These initiatives reflected not merely enlightened self-interest but genuine commitment to employee welfare as organizational duty. The Tata Code of Conduct explicitly requires that organizational activities must benefit society and that profit cannot justify unethical means.

Community engagement at Tata reflects Seva-Bhava principles through sustained investments in education, healthcare, and rural development in operational areas. During the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, Tata responded to the Taj Hotel tragedy not merely as business crisis but as duty to employees and guests, providing extraordinary compensation and support. This response exemplified Rajdharma principles of protective duty and exemplary conduct.

### **Infosys: Technology Leadership with Traditional Values**

Infosys, founded in 1981, demonstrates how Dharmic principles can guide organizations in contemporary sectors like information technology. The founders explicitly rejected conventional entrepreneurial wisdom that tolerates ethical compromises for business success. Instead, they built Infosys on principles of transparency, meritocracy, and stakeholder respect. The organization's commitment to transparency, exemplified by its comprehensive disclosure practices and stakeholder communications, reflects Dharmic principles of truth and accountability. Infosys pioneered practices like detailed quarterly reporting,

proactive disclosure of corporate governance matters, and transparent executive compensation policies that subsequently became industry standards.

Employee development at Infosys reflects Svadharma principles through investments in training, career development, and work-life balance that recognize employees as individuals with unique capabilities and life purposes rather than as interchangeable resources. The organization's campus infrastructure and cultural programs reflect holistic views of employee welfare extending beyond economic compensation.

### **Patanjali Ayurved: Ancient Wisdom in Modern Markets**

Patanjali Ayurved, founded in 2006, demonstrates how organizations can build competitive advantage by grounding business models in traditional Indian knowledge systems. The organization's products, based on Ayurvedic formulations, represent commercialization of ancient health wisdom. However, Patanjali's significance for Dharmic Management extends beyond products to encompass its business philosophy.

The organization's emphasis on natural ingredients, affordable pricing, and health awareness reflects service-orientation rather than pure profit-maximization. Patanjali's rapid growth demonstrates that ethical business models grounded in traditional values can achieve commercial success in competitive markets. The organization's promotion of yoga, traditional medicine, and indigenous knowledge contributes to broader cultural preservation and social welfare.

These case studies collectively demonstrate that Dharmic Management principles are not merely philosophical ideals but practical frameworks that can guide successful organizations across diverse sectors and competitive contexts. The organizations exemplify measurable success including sustained profitability, strong stakeholder relationships, ethical reputation, and positive social impact.

## **8. Global Integration: Adapting Dharmic Principles Across Cultures**

While Dharmic Management emerges from Indian philosophical traditions, its principles possess universal applicability that transcends cultural boundaries. However, successful global integration requires sensitivity to cultural contexts and thoughtful adaptation strategies.

### **Cross-Cultural Implementation Strategies**

The universality of Dharmic principles stems from their grounding in fundamental human experiences and ethical intuitions that resonate across cultures. Concepts like righteous leadership, stakeholder welfare, service-orientation, and environmental stewardship find parallels in diverse philosophical and religious traditions worldwide. However, specific terminology, practices, and institutional expressions must be adapted to different cultural contexts.

Successful cross-cultural implementation begins with identifying core principles that translate across contexts while remaining flexible about specific practices. For example, the principle of stakeholder welfare is universal, but specific stakeholder priorities and engagement mechanisms may vary across cultures. Similarly, the concept of service-orientation resonates globally, but appropriate expressions of service differ across cultural contexts.

Organizations implementing Dharmic principles in global contexts report several strategies for effective adaptation. First, emphasizing shared ethical principles rather than culturally specific terminology helps overcome initial resistance or misunderstanding. Second, demonstrating practical benefits through pilot implementations builds credibility and acceptance. Third, involving local leadership in adaptation processes ensures cultural sensitivity and local ownership.

### **Technology-Enabled Preservation and Dissemination**

Modern technology offers unprecedented opportunities for preserving, studying, and disseminating traditional management wisdom. Digital platforms enable wider access to classical texts through translations, commentaries, and scholarly analyses. Artificial intelligence applications can facilitate analysis of ancient texts to extract management principles and make them accessible to contemporary audiences.

Online education platforms enable global dissemination of courses on Dharmic Management, Indian Knowledge Systems, and indigenous management philosophies. These platforms overcome geographical barriers and make traditional wisdom accessible to international audiences. Virtual communities of practice enable practitioners to share experiences, challenges, and innovations in implementing Dharmic principles across diverse organizational contexts.

However, technology-enabled dissemination must maintain philosophical integrity and avoid superficial or commercialized representations of traditional wisdom. Scholarly oversight, traditional knowledge holder involvement, and quality control mechanisms ensure that technology serves authentic preservation and thoughtful adaptation rather than dilution or distortion.

## **9. Conclusion: Roadmap for Dharmic Management Education and Practice**

The integration of Dharmic Management principles into contemporary organizational practice requires systematic efforts in education, leadership development, and policy advocacy. This concluding section outlines a comprehensive roadmap for advancing this important agenda.

### **Curriculum Development for Business Schools**

Business education represents a crucial leverage point for mainstreaming Dharmic Management principles. Current management curricula, dominated by Western

theories and case studies, provide limited exposure to indigenous management philosophies. Integrating Dharmic Management into business education requires several initiatives.

**First**, developing foundational courses on Indian Knowledge Systems and management provides systematic introduction to philosophical principles, historical texts, and contemporary applications. These courses should combine rigorous scholarly analysis with practical relevance, demonstrating how ancient wisdom addresses modern challenges.

**Second**, integrating Dharmic perspectives into existing functional courses enriches conventional management education. For example, strategy courses can incorporate Arthashastra frameworks for competitive analysis and resource optimization. Leadership courses can explore Rajdharma principles alongside contemporary leadership theories. Human resource management courses can examine Svadharma concepts for talent management and employee development.

**Third**, case studies documenting Dharmic Management implementations provide concrete examples for analysis and discussion. Developing comprehensive case studies of organizations like Tata, Infosys, and others implementing traditional principles enables experiential learning about practical applications, implementation challenges, and measurable outcomes.

**Fourth**, research programs investigating Dharmic Management effectiveness, cross-cultural adaptation, and contemporary relevance build scholarly foundations for the field. Supporting faculty research, doctoral dissertations, and collaborative projects advances both theoretical understanding and practical knowledge.

### **Leadership Development Programs and Policy Implications**

Beyond formal education, leadership development programs for practicing managers provide crucial mechanisms for disseminating Dharmic Management principles. These programs can take various forms including executive education courses, corporate training initiatives, and mentorship programs connecting traditional knowledge holders with contemporary leaders.

Effective leadership development programs combine conceptual learning with practical application. Participants should engage with classical texts, analyze case studies, participate in reflective exercises examining their own leadership challenges through Dharmic lenses, and develop action plans for implementing principles in their organizations. Follow-up support and peer learning communities sustain implementation efforts beyond initial programs.

Policy implications of Dharmic Management extend to corporate governance regulations, business education standards, and economic development strategies. Governments and regulatory bodies can encourage Dharmic principles through various mechanisms including corporate governance guidelines emphasizing stakeholder welfare, incentive structures rewarding sustainable and ethical business practices, and procurement policies favoring organizations demonstrating social and environmental responsibility.

The preservation and advancement of traditional management wisdom requires collaboration among academic institutions, business organizations, government agencies, and traditional knowledge holders. Academic institutions provide scholarly analysis and educational programs. Business organizations demonstrate practical applications and share implementation experiences. Government agencies create enabling policy environments and support research initiatives. Traditional knowledge holders ensure philosophical authenticity and cultural integrity.

### **Vision for the Future**

Dharmic Management represents more than alternative management theory; it embodies a comprehensive vision for organizational excellence that integrates economic prosperity with ethical integrity, individual fulfillment with collective welfare, and contemporary innovation with timeless wisdom. As global challenges of environmental sustainability, social inequality, and ethical governance intensify, the relevance and urgency of Dharmic principles grow commensurately. The future of Dharmic Management depends upon sustained efforts to preserve traditional knowledge, adapt principles to contemporary contexts, demonstrate practical effectiveness, and educate new generations of ethical business leaders. These efforts require patience, commitment, and long-term perspective consistent with the principles themselves. The journey from marginal alternative to mainstream management paradigm will be gradual but can be transformative if pursued with dedication and wisdom.

This chapter contributes to this important journey by articulating philosophical foundations, demonstrating practical applications, documenting successful implementations, and proposing roadmaps for broader integration. The wisdom preserved in ancient Indian texts represents invaluable heritage not merely for Indian organizations but for global management thought. By bridging traditional wisdom with contemporary applications, Dharmic Management offers hope for creating organizations that succeed economically while contributing to human flourishing and environmental sustainability.

## Important Books

- Kautilya's Arthashastra, Translated by R. Shamasastri
- The Bhagavad Gita, Translated by Eknath Easwaran
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### **Brief Profile of Authors**

**Dr. Pritha Chaturvedi** is Associate Professor at ICFAI University Jharkhand, specializing in organizational behavior and Indian Knowledge Systems. She holds a Ph.D. in Management Studies with focus on indigenous management philosophies and their contemporary applications. Dr. Chaturvedi has published extensively in national and international journals on topics including ethical leadership, sustainable business practices, and the integration of traditional wisdom in modern management education. She also coordinates the **NEP and NAAC initiatives** of the University, focusing on outcome-based education, interdisciplinary learning, and quality assurance. Her research has been published in reputed journals such as **SAGE, Taylor & Francis**, and other **UGC-approved** outlets, and she is part of the **Reviewer Panel** for several international journals. A recipient of the **Best Teacher Award (2022)**, Dr. Chaturvedi is currently authoring a **chapter on Indian Knowledge**  
 Mob. +91-9204658264, E-mail: prithachaturvedi@iujharkhand.edu.in

## Redefining Legal Education with traditional Knowledge in the age of Modern Justice

Dr. Aishwarya Yadav<sup>1</sup>

Prithviraj Chavan<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*The development of a country's social, political and economic growth has frequently been reflected in the evolution of legal education. The colonial tradition of British common law is a major influence on contemporary legal education in India. This approach, however, usually overlooks the traditional wisdom and indigenous judicial systems that have regulated social interactions for millennia. There is an urgency to reconsider and rethink legal education by incorporating the treasures of aged knowledge systems in the era of modern justice, which has been defined by accelerating technology developments, globalisation, and changing human rights frameworks. This integration is an essential change to make legal education more accessible, egalitarian, and culturally relevant—it is not only a cultural or philosophical endeavour.*

*Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) include the traditional ideas, customs, and practices that have guided Indian society for centuries. These systems offered ways to solve disputes peacefully through community discussions, elders' advice, and local councils like Nyaya Panchayats. These traditional methods focused on fairness, social harmony, and solving problems together, rather than just punishing people. Despite its great jurisprudential significance, this repository of knowledge has been marginalised or completely ignored in formal legal education, which predominantly clings to colonial model. The exclusion of traditional legal perspectives from the mainstream curriculum not only undermines cultural diversity and local governance but also limits the adaptability and inclusivity of legal professionals in a pluralistic society like India.*

*The incorporation of traditional knowledge into legal education is not a retrogressive return to outdated standards; instead, it is a constructive realignment of pedagogy to align with socio-cultural realities and historical continuity. The inclusion of IKS gives critical review to the young minds how Indian jurisprudence reflected in texts such as the Manusmriti, Arthashastra, Dharmashastra, and other regional customs. By bringing IKS into legal education and justice systems, we can make the law more accessible, fair, and meaningful for all communities. Decolonising legal education can be effectively accomplished through the incorporation of traditional knowledge.*

*However, the majority of the continuing legal education system is still theoretical, focused on cities, and disconnected from the reality of rural areas. It ignores the sociocultural fabric of Indian society in favour of technical reasoning and Western law. Law students and the communities they seek to serve become estranged as a result. Students can acquire a deeper comprehension of justice and rights as viewed by various Indian communities by incorporating traditional knowledge into the curriculum. This includes local customs, environmental ethics, plural legal systems, historical legal texts like the Manusmriti and Arthashastra, and customary tribal codes.*

*The chapter looks at the traditional ways of solving disputes that can be used in today's legal system and how they can improve law education in India. It also critically examines the interaction between customary practices and the constitutional framework through landmark case laws.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge System, Custom and Practice, Traditional Methods, Education, Social Harmony.*

### **Introduction:**

A country's legal education frequently changes in accordance with its social, political, and economic developments. The colonial legacy of British common law has greatly influenced India's current legal education system. This framework replaced the traditional legal systems that regulated communities for decades, even as it brought codification, standardised processes, and institutionalised legal education. As a result of this colonial model's persisting dominance, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which are archives of legal knowledge derived from traditions, conventions, and communal practices, have been marginalised. Redefining legal education by including these indigenous traditions is imperative in the twenty-first century, a time of globalisation, rapid technological advancement, and changing human rights frameworks.

IKS integrates community-focused processes including tribal councils, Nyaya Panchayats, and elder-advised mediation. Reconciliation, equity, and group accountability were given precedence over punitive measures in these practices. Additionally, they mirror deeply ingrained dharma and social harmony concepts that are expressed in traditional books like as the Dharmashastras, Arthashastra, and Manusmriti.<sup>1</sup> These knowledge systems are still not included in mainstream curriculum despite their historical relevance, which leads to an urban-centric, excessively theoretical, and disconnected legal education model from the lived reality of India's rural and tribal inhabitants. This restriction restricts legal practitioners' capacity to adapt in a varied society and limits students' exposure to other legal systems.

IKS integration into legal pedagogy should be seen as a positive realignment of education with sociocultural realities and historical continuity rather than as a regressive retreat to antiquity. By exposing children to a variety of opinions on justice, from restorative justice procedures in village councils to environmental ethics ingrained in tribal cultures, such integration encourages critical thinking. Furthermore, decolonising legal education reclaiming India's intellectual legacy and placing it in line with international human rights standards and constitutional principles—requires incorporating local customs into contemporary curricula.

The connection between constitutional duties and traditional practices has frequently been a source of problem for Indian courts. In *State of Bihar v. Madhu Kishwar*,<sup>1</sup> The importance of customary tribal inheritance laws was recognised by the Supreme Court, which also emphasised the necessity of balancing them with the equality provisions included in the constitution. Likewise, in *Shah Bano Begum v. Mohd. Ahmed Khan*,<sup>1</sup> The Court addressed the conflicts between constitutional gender justice principles and personal law norms, highlighting the judiciary's function in balancing tradition and modernity. More recently, in *Shayara Bano v. Union of India*,<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned decisions highlight the need to critically examine indigenous customs within the framework of the constitution, a process that need to be reflected in legal education.

Therefore, in order to make India's legal education system more approachable, equitable, and culturally relevant, this chapter explores at how traditional conflict settlement techniques might be effectively incorporated into it. Through judicial rulings, it further examines the dynamic interplay between constitutional ideals and customs, emphasising the revolutionary potential of reframing legal education in the era of contemporary justice.

### **Philosophical Foundations of IKS and Indian Education**

So deeply rooted in India's cultural ethos, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is an extensive and diverse collection of native cultural practices. Its roots encompass philosophy, ethics, culture, and educational methods in addition to codified laws and formalised systems of government. Indian education has always been a comprehensive endeavour with the goals of fostering wisdom (*vidya*), moral principles (*dharma*), and emancipation (*moksha*), rather than just literacy or professional skills. These more general philosophical principles were constantly entwined with law, justice, and conflict resolution.

Re-examining IKS's foundations in philosophy offers a chance to rethink legal education by creating curriculum that honour indigenous traditions of justice, inclusion, and harmony. We can see how ancient Indian education may provide significant insights into forming modern legal pedagogy by looking at concepts like *dharma*, holistic learning, pluralism, and experiential knowledge.

## **1. The Concept of Knowledge in Indian Philosophy**

In IKS, knowledge (jnana or vidya) is considered holistically, encompassing intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social elements. The Upanishads state: sa vidya ya vimuktaye "that is knowledge which leads to liberation."<sup>1</sup> Unlike Western traditions, which often separate science, law and morality, IKS perceives knowledge as interconnected.

In addition to technical instruction, ancient Indian education emphasised character development and ethical responsibility. A jurist or ruler was expected to not only know the rules, but also to embody the principles of justice, compassion, and equality. Texts such as Kautilya's Arthashastra demonstrate that government and law were tightly linked to the moral imperative of maintaining community wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophical perspective has a direct impact on legal education: law is not simply a tool for control or litigation; it is a moral science dedicated to protecting social peace.

## **2. Dharma as the Core Foundation**

Dharma is an essential principle in Indian jurisprudence and education. Dharma, which may be interpreted as righteousness, obligation, or law, refers to the universal order that underpins individual and communal existence. The Manusmriti defines dharma as "that which is followed by learnt people, accepted by conscience, and beneficial to the welfare of all beings."<sup>1</sup>

In education, dharma directed the teachers and students. The guru had the divine job of transmitting both knowledge and virtue, whilst the student (shishya) was supposed to maintain discipline and truthfulness. In law, dharma articulated the philosophical rationale for adjudication, in which the judge served as a guardian of justice rather than just an interpreter of the laws.

Grounding curriculum in dharma for contemporary legal education entails coordinating technical legal knowledge with social responsibility, equality, and inclusion ideals. The moral core of the law must be taught at law schools in addition to its text.

## **3. The Gurukul Tradition and Experiential Learning**

The foundation of traditional Indian education was the gurukul system, in which pupils lived with their professors and acquired knowledge via discussion, practice, and observation. Oral transmission of knowledge combined theoretical understanding with real-world applications. Along with readings, students also internalised their professors' moral behaviour.

This approach is consistent with contemporary concepts in clinical legal education. Today's law students can gain practical experience through moot courts, internships, and legal aid clinics, much as students in the gurukul did by taking part in real-life events. These experiential learning methods guarantee that education is linked to real-world experiences rather than being limited to books.

#### **4. Pluralism in Indian Knowledge Systems**

Vedanta, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Buddhism, and Jainism are among the many schools of thought (darshanas) that are accepted in India's naturally heterogeneous intellectual heritage. Despite having different viewpoints on justice, ethics, and truth, each school coexisted in a discourse-based culture.

The belief of pluralism also permeated legal systems. Although they differed by area, caste, and tribe, customary rules were nonetheless seen as valid forms of justice. Tribal tribes, for example, still adhered to their own conflict resolution norms, which placed a strong emphasis on agreement and restorative justice. However, the colonial legal system suppressed this diversity by enforcing uniform norms that were based on British law.

Adopting the plural foundations of IKS in legal education entails fostering the capacity to resolve disputes between many views of justice, including constitutional, customary, tribal, and global, while also educating students to value these viewpoints.

#### **5. Education as Liberation (*Moksha*)**

The idea that knowledge leads to freedom is an additional fundamental principle of IKS. The ultimate objective of education was to liberate people from ignorance and misery; it was not only a vocational endeavour. This philosophical approach made sure that education promoted societal progress in addition to individual enlightenment.

In terms of law, this means that legal systems ought to enable everyone, particularly underprivileged groups, to attain equality and dignity. This idea is reflected in contemporary case law: in *Shah Bano Begum v. Mohd. Ahmed Khan*,<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the emancipatory role of the law, the Supreme Court maintained a Muslim woman's right to maintenance. The case of *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* is comparable,<sup>1</sup> The Court held that practices that were inconsistent with equality and dignity could not be accepted, therefore invalidating instant triple talaq.

Therefore, integrating this liberating perspective into legal education guarantees that lawyers are social change agents as well as legal experts.

#### **6. Community-Centric Knowledge and Dispute Resolution**

IKS placed a strong emphasis on justice delivery and community-based learning. Tribal meetings, village councils (Nyaya Panchayats), and elder mediation were essential for resolving conflicts. Participatory in nature, these approaches prioritised reconciliation above punitive measures.

This community-centered approach aligns with contemporary restorative justice ideas. For instance, in some regions of India, tribal legal systems continue to operate, striking a balance between regional traditions and constitutional requirements. In *State of Bihar v. Madhu Kishwar*,<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Court

emphasised constitutional equality while acknowledging the significance of traditional tribal rules in inheritance.

These traditions can be included into legal education programs that emphasise community-based legal services, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and restorative practices.

## 7. Ethical and Environmental Dimensions

IKS includes ethical and ecological considerations into its ideology as well. Texts like the Atharvaveda stress harmony between human existence and the environment, while the Rig Veda declares nature to be sacred.<sup>1</sup> Many tribal customs similarly treat forests, rivers, and animals as integral to community life.

In modern era, courts have drawn upon these traditions to protect the environment. In the case of *Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar*,<sup>1</sup> the Supreme Court acknowledged, the right to a clean environment as part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. By incorporating such perspectives into legal education deepens students' appreciation of environmental ethics rooted in IKS.

## 8. Implications for Redefining Legal Education

Based on these philosophical principles, there have been several approaches to reinterpret legal education in India:

- **Holistic Curriculum:** Incorporate philosophy, ethics, and social justice into your legal education in addition to technical knowledge.
- **Integration of Indigenous Texts:** Inclusion of the study of ancient works such as the Manusmriti, Arthashastra, and Dharmashastras along with constitutional and statutory laws.
- **Plural Legal Systems:** Students should be taught about tribal codes, customary rules, and how they relate to the constitution.
- **Experiential Learning:** Adopt ADR modules and community-based clinics that derive inspiration from the Gurukul tradition.
- **Transformative Purpose:** Students continue to develop an understanding of the law as a means of equality and liberty that is consistent with constitutional morality.

By incorporating these ideas, law schools may produce practitioners who are sensitive to the social, ethical, and cultural aspects of justice in addition to having a strong technical reasoning foundation.

## Integration of IKS in Modern Curriculum

The incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the modern curriculum has become one of the most contentious issues in current academic and policy circles. The theory is based on the awareness that education, especially legal education, cannot be separated from a nation's social, cultural, and intellectual traditions. In India, the discourse on IKS finds significant importance because of the country's civilisational legacy, encompassing decades of philosophical

reflection, jurisprudential wisdom, scientific advances and ethical principles. The contemporary education system, which was adopted during colonial rule, essentially replaced traditional practices and imposed a continental framework of knowledge. Today, as India redefines its position in global educational platforms, the revival and integration of IKS with modern curricula offers a pathway to restore continuity with indigenous wisdom, while additionally ensuring that learners are equipped with contemporary skills to address current challenges.

In the context of legal education, this integration is particularly important. Law is more than just a series of laws; it is also a normative system that represents societal values. To create jurisprudence that is both culturally relevant and globally competent, Indian legal education must be grounded in traditional knowledge but being orientated towards modern justice systems. The incorporation of IKS into legal curriculum is thus not about romanticising the past, but rather about learning from it to enrich the future.

### **The Historical Context of Knowledge Systems in India**

Indian knowledge traditions have always been diverse, multidisciplinary, and based on a holistic understanding. The Dharmashastra, Arthashastra, Nyaya Sutras, and Buddhist Vinaya Pitaka all demonstrate extensive knowledge of law, ethics, politics, and social order. These texts viewed law not as a separate subject, but as part of a larger moral and intellectual framework. Colonial education reforms under Macaulay's "Minute on Education" (1835) condemned these systems as useless, adopting instead an English-oriented curriculum structured by Western frameworks.<sup>1</sup>

This colonial breach has long-term implications. It alienated the educated elite from indigenous traditions, weakening the credibility of Indian epistemologies. The continuance of such educational systems after independence has contributed to the curriculum's ongoing imbalance. Thus, the proposal for integrating IKS is not only cultural revivalism, but a corrective action to re-establish intellectual sovereignty and epistemic fairness.<sup>1</sup>

### **Rationale for Integrating IKS in Modern Curriculum**

- **Cultural Relevance and Identity Formation**

Education develops cultural identity in addition to professional skills. Graduates from programs that disregard indigenous knowledge systems run the danger of being estranged from their cultural heritage. Incorporating IKS encourages critical thinking on the relevance of India's civilisational accomplishments in modern circumstances while also bolstering students' sense of pride and belonging.<sup>1</sup>

- **Epistemic Diversity and Inclusivity**

The importance of diverse epistemologies is becoming more widely acknowledged by global knowledge networks. Alternative frameworks for comprehending law, justice, environment, and government are provided by indigenous knowledge

traditions. Epistemic diversity is provided by integrating IKS, allowing students to approach issues from a variety of angles.<sup>1</sup>

- **Holistic Pedagogy**

Jnana (knowledge), karma (activity), and bhakti (devotion or ideals) were all stressed in traditional Indian schooling. This all-encompassing method fostered spiritual, ethical, and intellectual growth. By integrating these frameworks, legal education may develop judges and solicitors with a sense of ethical duty, going beyond merely imparting technical knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

- **Global Competitiveness through Local Strengths**

India has to exhibit its intellectual heritage as it becomes a global leader. A program that strikes a balance between IKS and contemporary legal frameworks can provide graduates distinctive perspectives that enable them to contribute significantly to global forums like environmental law, human rights, and alternative conflict resolution.<sup>1</sup>

### **Models of Integration in Modern Curriculum**

IKS integration into contemporary education entails careful inclusion rather than a complete replacement of current systems. The models listed below may be taken into consideration:

- **Curricular Infusion Model**

Under this model IKS elements are included into already-existing courses. For example, constitutional law courses can analyse how dharma affects justice; environmental law courses can look at historical water conservation techniques; and governance courses can look at panchayati raj as originating from traditional self-governing organisations.<sup>1</sup>

- **Dedicated Courses and Modules**

Introducing specialised courses on IKS, such "Ancient Indian Jurisprudence," "Comparative Indigenous Law," or "Philosophy of Dharma and Justice," is an additional way. These might serve as required foundation courses or electives that introduce students to the depth of India's knowledge base.<sup>1</sup>

- **Interdisciplinary Engagement**

IKS is not limited to just legal education. Its integration has to be multidisciplinary and involve cooperation with political science, philosophy, history, and Sanskrit departments. This keeps law students from being compartmentalised and gives them a deeper, multifaceted knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

- **Skill-Based Integration**

Skill-based training can also be influenced by traditional knowledge. For instance, students' comprehension of conflict resolution methods might be enhanced by studying contemporary arbitration alongside dispute settlement techniques like nyaya panchayats. Similar to this, specific legal fields might benefit from knowledge from Ayurveda regarding health law or Arthashastra regarding business regulation.<sup>1</sup>

## **Pedagogical Strategies for Integration**

- **Translation and Adaptation of Texts**

Language barriers often render it difficult to access ancient legal and philosophical works. Excellent translations are crucial, and they should be complemented with annotations that explain their applicability. Research centres for translating and modifying these works for legal pedagogy should be funded by universities.<sup>1</sup>

- **Case Study Method with Indigenous Examples**

Case study methodologies are used in legal education all around the world. Students can better understand the persistence of indigenous customs by including historical and modern case studies from Indian traditions, such as the settlement of disputes in village assemblies.<sup>1</sup>

- **Experiential Learning through Community Engagement**

Students can interact with traditional conflict settlement procedures, indigenous groups' customary laws, and rural government systems. This fosters respect for other legal systems and connects classroom instruction with real-world experiences.<sup>1</sup>

- **Use of Technology and Digital Resources**

Access to IKS can be greatly aided by digital platforms. Traditional teaching techniques can be enhanced by interactive technologies, digital manuscript archives, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).<sup>1</sup>

A revolutionary objective is expressed by the incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems into the contemporary curriculum, especially in legal education. It corrects historical injustices, enhances instruction, and gives pupils a more comprehensive view of justice and the law. The potential advantages—cultural relevance, epistemological variety, ethical foundation, and global competitiveness—make it an essential change, notwithstanding the difficulties. It will take multidisciplinary cooperation, academic rigour, and policy backing to institutionalise these reforms. By doing this, Indian legal education may be really updated for the era of contemporary justice.

## **Challenges in Integration and Future Directions**

In the era of contemporary justice, contemplating legal education through through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Traditional Knowledge (TK) offers both a great opportunity and a difficult task. The endeavour is not without structural, ideological, and pedagogical challenges, even though the integration of IKS promises to restore epistemic equilibrium and re-establish students' connection to India's civilisational legacy. However, the future course of such change needs to be carefully calibrated to steer clear of problems like academic dilution, political instrumentalization and romanticisation.

## **Following are the challenges and future directions in the integration of IKS: Challenges:**

### **1. Epistemological Challenges**

integrating the conceptual frameworks associated with traditional and modern knowledge systems is one of the major issues. Western positivist traditions have served as a major influence on modern legal education, especially in postcolonial nations like India. IKS, on the other hand, frequently draws from normative, ethical, and spiritual elements that are difficult to accommodate within positivist frameworks. In academics, this epistemological contradiction leads to resistance.<sup>1</sup> Influenced by thinkers such as John Austin and Jeremy Bentham, legal positivism places a strong emphasis on keeping morality and the law apart. On the other hand, the moral basis of justice is emphasised in Indian legal philosophy, which is enshrined in Dharmaśāstra or Nyāya. It's still quite difficult to integrate these without simplifying or producing hybrid inconsistencies.<sup>1</sup>

### **2. Skepticism within Academia**

IKS is associated with mistrust by a significant proportion of the legal academic world, which frequently rejects it as antiquated, unscientific, or unrelated to current legal issues. The colonial legacy of education, which established hierarchies favouring Western epistemologies over indigenous systems, is partially to blame for this scepticism.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, it is believed that IKS may not sufficiently educate graduates for competitive employment due to the professional demands of contemporary law, such as corporate legal practice, international law, and global arbitration. Resistance will continue unless these questions are answered by scholarship grounded on facts.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Standardization and Diversity**

IKS is context-driven, plural, and customised rather than monolithic. Tribal tribes' customary rules, for example, differ greatly throughout India, and even Dharmashastra texts have several regional modifications and interpretations. Such varied traditions run the risk of losing their richness if they are standardised for uniform curriculum. However, the lack of standardisation makes it challenging to create curricula, tests, and instructional strategies.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, striking a balance between authenticity and the pragmatic demands of a contemporary university curriculum is a structural issue.

### **4. Resource and Institutional Constraints**

The majority of Indian law schools already struggle with a lack of resources, including antiquated libraries, underpaid teachers, and inadequate research facilities. It is necessary to make significant investments in translation initiatives,

multidisciplinary faculty, and specialised research centres in order to integrate IKS. Attempts to integrate IKS run the danger of becoming tokenistic or superficial in the absence of sufficient financing and institutional desire.<sup>1</sup>

### **5. Pedagogical Barriers**

Doctrinal analysis, clinical practice, and case law procedures are all major components of traditional legal education. On the other hand, teaching IKS calls for philosophical training, contextual historical knowledge, and philological abilities (the ability to understand literature written in Sanskrit, Pali, or Prakrit). These days, very few legal professors have this knowledge. Long-term challenges include promoting integrative teaching and training new professors.<sup>1</sup>

### **6. Risk of Politicization and Ideological Appropriation**

The potential for IKS to be exploited by political or ideological goals is another important concern. IKS integration bears the risk of alienating minority populations and eroding pluralism if it is presented as a cultural nationalist endeavour rather than an intellectual one. Opponents may contend that rather than embracing India's diversity, these policies aim to impose a single cultural narrative.<sup>1</sup>

Protecting IKS from ideological monopolisation and maintaining inclusivity are essential to its credibility in legal education.

### **7. Global Relevance and Competitiveness**

Today's law graduates are seeking careers in law throughout the world. Critics wonder if a course that emphasises IKS would prepare students to compete in multinational companies, arbitration centres, or international courts. Students may view IKS integration as restricting rather than enhancing their job chances if it is not matched with international legal norms.<sup>1</sup>

It is a challenging yet revolutionary endeavour to incorporate Indian knowledge systems and traditional knowledge into contemporary legal education. It is impossible to undervalue the difficulties that range from worries about global competitiveness to resource limitations, politicisation, and epistemological opposition. However, these difficulties may be overcome with thorough preparation, inclusiveness, multidisciplinary cooperation, and robust institutional support.

### **Future Directions**

Despite these challenges, the integration of IKS in legal education offers immense potential if pursued with academic integrity, inclusivity, and long-term vision. Several pathways can be mapped for future directions:

#### **1. Developing an Interdisciplinary Framework**

IKS cannot be contained only within the lawful limits. Collaboration with the departments of philosophy, Sanskrit, anthropology, political science, and history

is necessary for its integration. For instance, a foundation in both legal theory and classical political philosophy is necessary when examining the Arthashastra for insights on economic regulation. Holistic teaching will be promoted via the establishment of multidisciplinary centres of excellence.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Rigorous Translation and Commentary Projects**

Primary source inaccessibility is a major obstacle to IKS integration. Texts like Mitakshara, Dayabhaga, Arthashastra, or Manusmriti must have excellent translations. To put these works in perspective and avoid misunderstandings, translations must be supplemented by academic commentary. Funding for translation initiatives including philologists, legal historians, and active solicitors must be given top priority in future reforms.<sup>1</sup>

## **3. Curriculum Design with Balanced Approach**

The balanced integration model should adopt in curriculum who neither marginalizing IKS as an optional subject nor overburdening students with excessive traditional material. Suggested strategies include:

- Embedding IKS in core subjects (e.g., “Constitutional Law and Dharma” ADR and Panchayat Raj etc).
- Offering elective courses on specialized themes (“Comparative Indigenous Legal Systems”).
- Introducing certificate or diploma programs for advanced research in IKS.<sup>1</sup>

## **4. Faculty Training and Capacity Building**

The advancement of faculty is essential. Law professors require exposure to a variety of disciplines, traditional text instruction, and innovative methods. Young scholars can get training in IKS and contemporary pedagogy through workshops, summer schools, and fellowships. These initiatives can be strengthened by partnerships with foreign comparative law academics.<sup>1</sup>

## **5. Harnessing Technology and Digital Archives**

Now in digital age various digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for making IKS accessible, such as the National Digital Library of India can host digitized manuscripts, video lectures, and MOOCs on IKS. Law students could engage with virtual classrooms, interactive debates and simulations that apply IKS concepts to modern legal dilemmas.<sup>1</sup>

## **6. Ensuring Inclusivity and Pluralism**

Further modifications should make sure that Sanskrit or Hindu traditions are not the only ones that use IKS. Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, and tribal jurisprudential traditions are also part of India's heterogeneous knowledge systems. A plural

approach will represent the actual variety of Indian legal thought and avoid alienating minority groups.<sup>1</sup>

### **7. Linking IKS with Contemporary Issues**

Linkage of IKS with contemporary issue is one of the most important aspects to understand customary practices to overcome with problems and maintaining balance between nature human and nature,law adnd order, individual rights etc.

#### **For example:**

- **Environmental Law:** integrating tribal customs and Atharva Vedic ideas of ecological equilibrium.
- **Dispute Resolution:** Integrating contemporary ADR with panchayat customs.
- **Human Rights:** Investigating the compassion and non-violence tenets of Buddhism and Jainism.

Such linkages will highlight the practical utility of IKS rather than treating it as an antiquarian subject.<sup>1</sup>

### **8. Institutional and Policy Support**

The National Education Policy 2020 establishes a solid platform for IKS integration. Future directions should include:

- Establishing *Centres for Legal IKS* in leading universities.
- Encouraging UGC and BCI to frame guidelines for curriculum reform.
- Providing research grants for doctoral and postdoctoral studies in IKS-law intersections.

Policy support is essential to ensure continuity and sustainability of reforms.<sup>1</sup>

### **9. International Collaboration and Cognitive Justice**

IKS should not be considered in isolation, but rather as part of a larger worldwide effort to recognise indigenous knowledge. Collaborations with institutions in Africa, Latin America, and Australia that research indigenous law can broaden comparative viewpoints. Such collaborations will propel India to the forefront of global efforts to promote cognitive fairness and epistemic diversity.

### **10. Long-Term Vision: Creating Contextually Rooted, Globally Relevant Jurists**

Furthermore, the future path must aim to produce jurists who are not only proficient in global legal practice but also profoundly entrenched in Indian traditions. These graduates may innovate in sectors such as environmental law, bioethics, and restorative justice, relying on indigenous knowledge while participating in global debates. This dual competency will reshape Indian legal education for the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup>

The future rests in developing a curriculum that acknowledges the depth of IKS while also providing students with skills for current judicial systems. When pursued with academic rigour and plurality, such integration can not only

decolonise Indian legal education, but also contribute considerably to global debates on law, justice, and epistemic diversity.

### **Case studies**

The inclusion of Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern legal education is more than just a theoretical goal; it has already gained traction in a variety of trials across India and abroad. Case studies demonstrate how indigenous legal traditions, ethical frameworks, and conflict resolution procedures may influence modern education and practice. They emphasise both the potential advantages and actual difficulties of rethinking legal education in the age of contemporary justice.

In order to illustrate the need of incorporating traditional knowledge into the legal curriculum, this section looks at a few case examples from India and other comparable countries.

#### **1. Panchayati Raj and Dispute Resolution**

The Panchayati Raj system, which has its roots in long-standing customs of village-level self-governance, is among the most notable instances of indigenous legal practice. In the past, panchayats served as both administrative and local judicial institutions, depending more on restorative justice and consensus-building techniques than on combative litigation.<sup>1</sup>

Through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), which granted Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) constitutional legitimacy, modern India formalised this heritage. These days, PRIs settle conflicts at the local level, frequently more quickly and cheaply than traditional courts.

**The panchayat model offers a real-world case study for legal education on:**

- **Decentralized justice delivery;**
- **Consensus-based dispute resolution;** and
- **Integration of custom with constitutional mandates.**

The institution like National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, have already experimented with immersing students in panchayat level justice systems with clinical legal education program, this help to the students to understand both strengths and limitations of indigenous dispute resolution.<sup>1</sup>

#### **2. Environmental Jurisprudence and Traditional Knowledge**

Another compelling example of how traditional knowledge shapes contemporary law is seen in India's environmental jurisprudence. The Supreme Court has frequently cited historical writings and cultural customs while formulating environmental protection principles. For example, the Court highlighted the Public Trust Doctrine in *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath* (1997), which resonated with the ancient Indian sense of nature as holy and inviolable.<sup>1</sup>

The sustainable agricultural, water harvesting, and forest protection methods used by indigenous populations continue to influence environmental law and policy.

For instance, the Bishnoi people of Rajasthan have long practiced ecological ethics by preserving their forests and animals, predating the contemporary idea of biodiversity protection.<sup>1</sup>

Such examples show how indigenous knowledge systems are still applicable to modern global challenges like ecological justice, sustainable development, and climate change when they are included into environmental law courses.

### **3. Customary Law in Tribal Communities**

Tribal populations in India, especially those in the Northeastern states, have extensive systems of customary law. For instance, marriage, inheritance, and conflict settlement are governed by customary law in Nagaland and Mizoram, and these customs are protected under Article 371A of the Constitution.<sup>1</sup>

As long as they don't go against constitutional principles, the Gauhati High Court and other regional courts have acknowledged the validity of such customary laws. For law students, this simultaneous acceptance of many legal systems provides an intriguing case study to examine the following issues:

- Legal pluralism;
- Conflict of laws; and
- Constitutional accommodation of indigenous practices.

In comparison with codified legal systems, students can understand how customary law operates in practice through field-based study with indigenous groups.

### **4. Restorative Justice Inspired by Gandhian Thought**

The restorative justice movements in India and across the world have been impacted by Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on truth, reconciliation, and communal peace. Gandhian ideas of informal, conciliation-based conflict resolution are reflected in the Lok Adalat system, which was established by the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987.<sup>1</sup>

Every year, Lok Adalats settle millions of disputes, relieving the strain on official courts and encouraging cooperative resolutions. This is a hybrid paradigm for legal education in which indigenous conciliation traditions serve as inspiration for contemporary legislative systems. Students at law schools that participate in clinical programs or observe Lok Adalat are exposed to restorative and community-based concepts of justice.

### **5. Ayurveda, Bioethics, and Health Law**

Traditional knowledge also contributes to contemporary discourse in the fields of health law and bioethics. The ancient Indian medical system known as Ayurveda places a strong emphasis on ethical doctor-patient relationships and comprehensive well-being. Ayurveda's emphasis on body, mind, and spirit balance can provide important insights into current medical ethics discussions, including those involving informed consent, euthanasia, and genetic research.<sup>1</sup>

Culturally sensitive approaches to bioethics can be fostered by including Ayurvedic notions into health law curriculum, which can provide students alternative ethical frameworks. Multidisciplinary programs that combine Ayurveda with contemporary medical and legal disciplines have been pioneered by institutions such as Banaras Hindu University.

## 6. Arthashastra and Economic Regulation

A classic work on economic regulation and statecraft, Kautilya's Arthashastra offers timeless insights on administrative law, corporate governance, and taxes. Researchers have contrasted Kautilya's ideas with contemporary anti-corruption and economic control policies.<sup>1</sup>

His focus on officials' responsibility, for instance, is similar to current anti-corruption legislation such as the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1988. Students may understand India's regulatory philosophy in the context of its own intellectual legacy by studying Arthashastra alongside contemporary business and administrative law.

## 7. Comparative Case Study: Indigenous Jurisprudence in Other Jurisdictions

The process of incorporating TK into the legislation is not exclusive to India. Comparative case studies show more expansive options:

- **New Zealand:** Cases such as *New Zealand Maori Council v. Attorney-General* (1987) recognised Maori customary law, demonstrating the power of indigenous traditions to shape constitutional interpretation.<sup>1</sup>
- **South Africa:** As long as customary law is consistent with constitutional rights, the Constitutional Court has acknowledged it as a legitimate source of law.<sup>1</sup>
- **Canada:** Law school courses are increasingly incorporating Indigenous legal systems, which fosters cognitive justice and reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

These cases show that the worldwide effort of integrating traditional knowledge may be greatly aided by Indian legal education.

## Challenges Revealed by Case Studies

While these case studies highlight success stories, they also reveal challenges:

- Ensuring **compatibility with constitutional rights**;
- Avoiding **tokenism** in integration;
- Training faculty for **interdisciplinary pedagogy**;
- Balancing **local traditions with global legal standards**.

Case studies are live classrooms for comprehending the interplay between contemporary legal frameworks and old knowledge systems. Examples of IKS's applicability in tackling current legal issues range from panchayats and tribal customary laws to environmental jurisprudence and restorative justice. They also stress the importance of critical, plural, and context-sensitive integration into legal education and warn against uncritical romanticisation.

Law students and academics may understand the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity by looking at these case studies, which guarantees that the redesigned legal education is both culturally grounded and sensitive to the needs of the global community.

## **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

It is a civilisational necessity, not just an academic experiment, to include traditional knowledge (IKS) into legal education. The cultural, historical, and philosophical ethos of the society they serve is reflected in legal systems, which do not function in a vacuum. Colonial frameworks that prioritised Eurocentric jurisprudence and frequently ignored local epistemologies influenced India's legal education for centuries. Even while contemporary law schools have made great progress in advancing human rights, constitutional ideals, and comparative viewpoints, they have not yet sufficiently addressed India's specific legal, ethical, and governance traditions.

A distinct source of insights on justice, equity, and social order may be found in the philosophical diversity of Indian knowledge systems, which include the Dharmaśāstras, Arthashastra, Buddhist legal theory, traditional dispute settlement techniques, and tribal law. IKS can help create a more comprehensive, inclusive, and culturally grounded legal education when it is discussed in relation to contemporary legal concepts. In addition to fostering intellectual diversity, such a paradigm responds to the urgent need to decolonise and socially relevantize education.

The procedure is not without difficulties, though. Unresolved issues include curriculum design, academic opposition, standardisation, and striking a balance between tradition and modernity. The risk of romanticising tradition without critically examining it is as urgent, particularly in fields where prevailing customs may be at odds with the equality, liberty, and dignity guaranteed by the constitution. Therefore, rather than adopting tradition in its entirety, the future of incorporating IKS into legal education rests on a dynamic synthesis.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **1. Curriculum Innovation**

Law schools ought to include IKS courses into their curricula in a methodical manner. Elective courses on indigenous concepts of justice, customary law, conflict settlement customs, and comparative jurisprudence might all fall under this category. These ought to be included into the fundamental courses of criminal justice, constitutional law, and jurisprudence rather than being treated as supplemental readings.

### **2. Research and Documentation**

For the purpose of documenting and researching indigenous legal traditions, universities and research institutes must set up specialised centres. Manuscripts,

oral traditions, and regional customs still contain a large portion of this information. For students and academics to have access to this legacy, a nationwide digitisation, translation, and interpretation initiative is necessary.

### **3. Capacity Building for Faculty**

To prepare legal educators to teach IKS in a modern setting, faculty development programs are required. In order to create a multidisciplinary pedagogy, this entails interdisciplinary study and interacting with historians, philosophers, anthropologists, and practitioners of traditional knowledge.

### **4. Community Engagement**

In communities where traditional governance institutions and customary conflict resolution are practiced, legal education ought to transcend the confines of the classroom. Immersion of students in these kinds of settings helps facilitate experiential learning, which connects theory and practice.

### **5. Balancing Tradition and Modernity**

The morals of the constitution must not be jeopardised by the incorporation of IKS, according to policymakers. It is important to evaluate, reinterpret, or abandon practices that uphold social exclusion, gender discrimination, or caste hierarchy. The objective is to take the timeless qualities of justice, harmony, and moral leadership from the past rather than to recreate it.

### **6. Policy and Institutional Support**

IKS should be required to be taught in legal curriculum by the Bar Council of India, the University Grants Commission, and the National Education Policy (NEP) framework. Institutions that lead this integration should get infrastructure and financial assistance.

### **7. Global Dialogue**

India has to situate its legal education, which draws inspiration from IKS, within a global discourse on knowledge decolonisation. Partnerships with academic institutions in Asia, Latin America, and Africa—regions with comparable colonial legacies—can promote comparative analysis and common approaches.

The goal of redefining legal education through an understanding of traditional knowledge is to enhance modernity rather than to reject it. It is necessary to draw from a variety of wisdom sources, both ancient and modern, indigenous and international, in order to establish a just and equitable legal system. India may develop a legal education system that is grounded in its civilisational values, sensitive to current issues, and pertinent to the goals of future generations by incorporating IKS into present curriculum.

## 8.

# Dharmic Finance: Reimagining Wealth Creation and Financial Governance Through Ancient Indian Wisdom

**Dr. Pritha Chaturvedi**

*Associate Professor, ICFAI University Jharkhand*

*Email: prithachaturvedi@iujharkhand.edu.in*

**Prof. Sumit Kumar Sinha**

*Assistant Professor, ICFAI University Jharkhand*

*Email: sumitsinha@iujharkhand.edu.in*

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### Abstract

*In an era marked by financial crises, ethical scandals, and unsustainable economic practices, the ancient Indian concept of 'Artha' emerges as a transformative framework for reimagining modern financial management. This chapter explores how Dharmic Finance - the integration of righteous wealth creation principles from Indian Knowledge Systems with contemporary financial practices - offers a revolutionary approach to sustainable economic prosperity that transcends mere profit accumulation to encompass ethical wealth distribution, stakeholder welfare, and long-term financial stability.*

*Drawing from the profound financial wisdom embedded in classical Indian texts like the Arthashastra, Mahabharata, Chanakya Neeti, and various Puranas, this research demonstrates how ancient Indian financial principles can revolutionize modern economic behavior. Kautilya's Arthashastra presents sophisticated frameworks for public finance, taxation policy, monetary management, and risk assessment that find remarkable resonance with contemporary financial challenges. The text's detailed exposition on 'Kosh' (treasury management), 'Vyaya' (expenditure control), and 'Aaya' (revenue optimization) provides timeless insights for both corporate financial management and public fiscal policy.*

*The research extensively examines how Dharmic Finance transcends conventional Western financial theories through its emphasis on righteousness (Dharma), prosperity (Artha), and collective welfare (Sarvodaya). Key concepts include 'Dhan-Dharma' (righteous wealth creation that benefits society), 'Yajna-Arthaneeti' (sacrificial economics promoting circular wealth flow), and 'Aparigraha' (non-possessiveness preventing excessive accumulation). Through comprehensive case study analysis of leading Indian financial institutions like HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, and traditional cooperative societies, the chapter demonstrates the practical implementation and measurable success of Dharmic Finance principles, contributing significantly to the emerging field of indigenous financial studies.*

**Key Words:** *Dharmic Finance, Arthashastra Economics, Ethical Wealth Creation, Sustainable Financial Management, Indigenous Banking Systems.*

## **1. Introduction: The Dharmic Paradigm in Modern Finance**

The global financial landscape of the twenty-first century stands at a critical crossroads. The 2008 financial crisis, subsequent sovereign debt crises, recurring corporate financial scandals, and the widening chasm of economic inequality have collectively exposed fundamental flaws in conventional financial systems. Contemporary finance, predominantly rooted in Western capitalist frameworks emphasizing profit maximization, short-term gains, and shareholder primacy, increasingly demonstrates inadequacy in addressing the complex challenges of sustainable economic development, ethical wealth distribution, and long-term financial stability.

Against this backdrop of financial turmoil and ethical crisis, the ancient Indian concept of 'Artha' offers a compelling alternative paradigm for financial governance and wealth creation. Artha, often inadequately translated as 'wealth' or 'prosperity,' represents a comprehensive philosophical and practical framework that encompasses economic activity, resource management, wealth creation, and financial governance within the broader context of Dharma (righteousness) and ultimate human welfare. When applied to contemporary financial contexts, Dharmic Finance transcends the narrow confines of profit accumulation to embrace ethical wealth creation, equitable distribution, stakeholder welfare, and sustainable prosperity.

### **Defining Dharmic Finance and Its Contemporary Relevance**

Dharmic Finance can be defined as an integrated approach to financial management and economic activity that draws upon the philosophical, ethical, and practical wisdom embedded in ancient Indian texts and traditions. This approach is fundamentally characterized by several distinguishing features that differentiate it from conventional Western financial theories.

**First,** Dharmic Finance establishes righteousness (Dharma) as the non-negotiable foundation of all financial activities. Unlike conventional finance where ethical considerations often function as constraints or compliance requirements, Dharmic Finance positions ethical conduct as the fundamental purpose, with wealth creation serving as a legitimate but secondary objective. This inversion of priorities fundamentally transforms the nature of financial decision-making, investment strategies, and wealth distribution mechanisms.

**Second,** Dharmic Finance adopts a multi-stakeholder orientation that recognizes the interdependence of all economic participants including investors, borrowers, employees, communities, future generations, and the natural environment. This stakeholder-centric approach challenges the shareholder primacy doctrine that

dominates contemporary corporate finance and offers frameworks for balancing competing claims while maintaining ethical integrity.

**Third**, Dharmic Finance emphasizes long-term sustainable value creation over short-term financial gains. Ancient Indian economic philosophy recognizes that authentic prosperity requires patience, prudence, and perspective that extends across generations. This temporal orientation addresses one of the most pernicious aspects of modern finance - the obsessive focus on quarterly results and immediate returns that drives unsustainable practices and systemic instability.

The contemporary relevance of Dharmic Finance stems from its unique capacity to address several critical challenges facing modern financial systems. In an era of widespread financial fraud and ethical failures, Dharmic principles provide robust frameworks for building financial institutions rooted in integrity, transparency, and accountability. As environmental sustainability becomes imperative for economic survival, the Dharmic emphasis on harmony with nature and intergenerational equity offers practical guidance for sustainable investment and responsible lending practices. In contexts of growing economic inequality and social unrest, Dharmic concepts of wealth circulation and equitable distribution provide solutions for inclusive prosperity.

### **The Crisis of Conventional Financial Systems**

Contemporary financial theory and practice face multiple fundamental crises that question their continued adequacy and legitimacy. **The first** crisis is ethical in nature. The repeated occurrence of financial scandals - from the Enron debacle and WorldCom fraud to the subprime mortgage crisis and LIBOR manipulation - reveals systemic ethical failures that cannot be dismissed as aberrations. Modern financial theory, rooted in efficient market hypothesis and rational actor assumptions, has proven inadequate in cultivating genuine ethical commitment within financial institutions. The agency theory framework that dominates corporate finance provides insufficient guidance for preventing conflicts of interest, self-dealing, and opportunistic behavior that periodically destabilize financial systems.

**The second** crisis concerns financial stability and systemic risk. The interconnected nature of modern financial markets, combined with increasingly complex financial instruments and leveraged positions, creates systemic vulnerabilities that conventional risk management frameworks struggle to address. The 2008 global financial crisis demonstrated how mathematical sophistication and quantitative risk models provide false confidence while masking fundamental instabilities. Traditional financial theories that assume normally distributed returns and rational behavior fail to account for the fat-tailed distributions, contagion effects, and herd behaviors that characterize actual financial markets.

**The third** crisis involves inequality and distributive justice. Despite unprecedented global wealth creation, economic inequality has reached levels not seen since the early twentieth century. Contemporary financial systems, optimized for capital accumulation and return maximization, systematically favor those with existing wealth while limiting opportunities for economic mobility. The financialization of the economy - where increasing proportions of profits derive from financial activities rather than productive enterprise - has created wealth concentration that threatens social cohesion and political stability.

**The fourth** crisis concerns environmental degradation and resource depletion. Financial systems that discount future costs, externalize environmental damages, and prioritize immediate returns systematically undervalue environmental sustainability. While concepts like green finance and ESG investing have emerged as responses, these often remain peripheral to mainstream financial decision-making. The fundamental logic of conventional finance - maximize returns regardless of broader consequences - drives resource exploitation and environmental destruction that threaten long-term human prosperity.

These crises collectively point toward the need for alternative financial paradigms that integrate ethical foundations, systemic stability, distributive justice, and environmental consciousness into the very essence of financial theory and practice. Dharmic Finance offers such an alternative paradigm, grounded in millennia of practical experience and philosophical reflection on righteous wealth creation and sustainable prosperity.

## **2. Philosophical Foundations of Dharmic Finance**

The philosophical foundations of Dharmic Finance rest upon sophisticated intellectual traditions preserved in classical Indian texts spanning over three millennia. These texts contain profound insights into economic behavior, financial management, wealth distribution, and fiscal policy that remain remarkably relevant to contemporary financial challenges.

### **Core Principles from Arthashastra, Mahabharata, and Puranas**

The Arthashastra, composed by Kautilya (also known as Chanakya) around the fourth century BCE, represents one of the most comprehensive treatises on economics, public finance, and fiscal management in world literature. Far from being merely a political manual, the Arthashastra contains sophisticated analyses of monetary policy, taxation systems, public expenditure management, debt administration, and treasury operations that rival contemporary public finance textbooks in their analytical rigor and practical detail.

Central to the Arthashastra's financial philosophy is the concept of 'Artha' as righteous prosperity. Kautilya explicitly states that Artha must be pursued in accordance with Dharma, meaning that wealth creation cannot justify unethical means. The text provides detailed guidance on legitimate versus illegitimate sources of revenue, ethical versus exploitative taxation practices, and proper

versus improper uses of public funds. This ethical framework challenges modern financial practices where success is often measured purely by quantitative metrics regardless of the means employed.

The Arthashastra's treatment of public finance demonstrates remarkable sophistication. The text discusses various revenue sources including taxes on agricultural production, commercial transactions, mining operations, and monopoly enterprises. Kautilya articulates clear principles for taxation policy including that taxes should be moderate to avoid discouraging productive activity, taxation should be proportionate to capacity to pay, and tax collection should minimize harassment of taxpayers. These principles anticipate modern concepts of optimal taxation, ability-to-pay principles, and administrative efficiency by over two millennia.

The concept of 'Kosh' (treasury management) receives extensive treatment in the Arthashastra. Kautilya emphasizes that proper treasury management requires accurate accounting, secure storage, prudent investment of surplus funds, and maintaining adequate reserves for emergencies and opportunities. The text prescribes detailed systems for financial record-keeping, audit procedures, and fraud prevention that demonstrate understanding of internal controls and accountability mechanisms comparable to modern financial management practices.

The principle of 'Vyaya' (expenditure management) in the Arthashastra establishes clear priorities for public spending. Kautilya argues that expenditure should prioritize productive investments that enhance future capacity over consumptive spending that provides only immediate satisfaction. This principle resonates with modern distinctions between capital and current expenditure and supports the case for infrastructure investment, education spending, and research funding that generate long-term benefits.

The Mahabharata, while primarily known as an epic narrative, contains extensive discussions of economic ethics and financial principles. The Sabha Parva (Assembly Hall section) describes the ideal royal treasury and its management, emphasizing the balance between accumulation and distribution. The epic articulates the principle of 'Dhan-Dharma' - the righteous use of wealth - establishing that wealth exists not for personal aggrandizement but for fulfilling social responsibilities and supporting collective welfare.

The Mahabharata's treatment of 'Rinn' (debt) offers profound insights into credit relationships and obligations. The text distinguishes between different types of debts including inherited debts, commercial debts, and moral obligations. Importantly, the Mahabharata emphasizes that creditors have ethical responsibilities alongside debtors, including lending responsibly, charging

reasonable interest, and showing compassion in cases of genuine hardship. This bilateral ethical framework contrasts sharply with modern credit relationships that emphasize creditor rights while marginalizing debtor welfare.

The Puranas, particularly texts like the Vishnu Purana and Matsya Purana, contain detailed descriptions of economic systems, monetary standards, and commercial practices in ancient India. These texts describe various forms of currency, exchange mechanisms, banking practices, and trade regulations that demonstrate sophisticated understanding of monetary economics. The concept of 'Vyavahar' (commercial conduct) in the Puranas establishes ethical standards for business transactions including honesty in dealings, fairness in pricing, quality assurance, and contractual integrity.

The Chanakya Neeti, attributed to Kautilya but representing later compilations of his wisdom, contains numerous maxims relevant to financial management. These include principles such as "wealth should be saved to protect against adversity," "one should not spend more than one's income," and "wealth acquired through righteous means brings happiness while wealth from unethical sources brings destruction." These principles articulate timeless financial wisdom about prudence, living within means, and the ethical foundations of prosperity.

### **Comparative Analysis with Western Financial Theories**

Understanding Dharmic Finance requires examining its distinctiveness relative to dominant Western financial theories. Modern financial economics, pioneered by scholars like Harry Markowitz, Franco Modigliani, Merton Miller, and Eugene Fama, builds upon several foundational assumptions including rational actors who maximize utility, efficient markets that accurately price assets, and the primacy of shareholder value maximization. While these theories have generated valuable insights and practical tools, they demonstrate significant limitations when confronted with actual financial behavior and contemporary economic challenges. Classical economic theory, originating with Adam Smith and developed through neoclassical economics, assumes that individual pursuit of self-interest leads to collective welfare through the "invisible hand" of market mechanisms. While Dharmic Finance acknowledges the productivity of market systems and individual initiative, it fundamentally differs in its view of self-interest and collective welfare. Dharmic philosophy recognizes that unconstrained self-interest often conflicts with collective welfare, particularly when market participants possess unequal power or when markets fail to price externalities accurately. Therefore, Dharmic Finance emphasizes ethical constraints and regulatory frameworks that ensure individual economic activity serves broader social purposes.

Modern portfolio theory and capital asset pricing model represent sophisticated frameworks for investment decision-making that optimize risk-return tradeoffs. However, these frameworks typically treat risk as statistical variance of returns

without adequately addressing ethical risks, social consequences, or systemic instabilities. Dharmic Finance incorporates broader risk considerations including reputational risks from unethical conduct, social risks from inequality-generating practices, and karmic risks from actions that harm others even if they generate immediate financial returns. Agency theory, which dominates contemporary corporate finance, focuses on aligning managerial incentives with shareholder interests through compensation structures, monitoring mechanisms, and governance systems. While Dharmic Finance acknowledges principal-agent problems, it fundamentally rejects the assumption that shareholder interests should dominate all other considerations. Instead, Dharmic Finance conceptualizes corporate managers as trustees (similar to the ancient Indian concept of 'Rajdharmā') with duties to multiple stakeholders including employees, customers, communities, and future generations.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between Dharmic Finance and Western financial theories concerns the ultimate purpose of financial activity. Western theories, even stakeholder-oriented approaches, typically view financial objectives as paramount with ethical and social considerations functioning as constraints or instrumental factors. Dharmic Finance inverts this hierarchy, establishing righteous conduct and social welfare as ultimate purposes with financial success serving as a necessary but subordinate objective. This reorientation transforms fundamental questions of financial management from "how can we maximize returns?" to "how can we create sustainable prosperity that benefits all stakeholders while maintaining ethical integrity?"

The efficient market hypothesis, which suggests that market prices fully reflect all available information, has been repeatedly challenged by behavioral finance research documenting systematic biases and market anomalies. Dharmic Finance offers alternative perspectives on market behavior grounded in understanding of human psychology articulated in ancient Indian texts. Concepts like 'Moha' (delusion), 'Lobha' (greed), and 'Bhaya' (fear) from Indian philosophy provide frameworks for understanding the emotional and cognitive factors that drive financial market behavior, complementing Western behavioral finance research with deeper philosophical insights.

### **3. Kautilya's Financial Wisdom: Treasury and Fiscal Management**

The Arthashastra's treatment of treasury management and fiscal policy represents one of the most sophisticated expositions of public finance in ancient literature. Kautilya's principles, developed for managing royal treasuries and state finances, offer timeless insights applicable to both public fiscal management and corporate financial planning in contemporary contexts.

## **Ancient Principles of Public Finance and Taxation**

Kautilya's approach to public finance begins with the fundamental principle that state finances must serve public welfare rather than ruler enrichment. The opening sections of the Arthashastra establish that the king's prosperity derives from subjects' prosperity, inverting the exploitative relationship often observed in ancient kingdoms. This principle establishes public finance as a trust relationship where fiscal authorities manage resources on behalf of the people, anticipating modern concepts of fiduciary duty and public accountability by over two millennia.

The Arthashastra describes numerous sources of public revenue, classifying them into distinct categories including 'Kara' (taxes on production and income), 'Sulka' (customs duties and commercial taxes), and 'Grahya' (fines and fees). This sophisticated revenue classification demonstrates understanding that different revenue sources possess different characteristics regarding stability, growth potential, and administrative requirements - insights that remain relevant for contemporary public finance management.

Kautilya's principles of taxation demonstrate remarkable sophistication and ethical sensitivity. The text establishes that taxation should follow the principle of 'Matsya-nyaya' (law of fish), meaning that strong should not exploit weak just as large fish devour small fish in absence of order. To prevent such exploitation, Kautilya advocates moderate taxation rates that preserve productive capacity while generating necessary revenue. Specifically, the Arthashastra recommends agricultural taxes at one-sixth of production, recognizing that excessive taxation discourages cultivation and ultimately reduces total revenue - an insight that anticipates the Laffer curve concept by over two thousand years.

The text also addresses tax administration with detailed prescriptions for assessment procedures, collection mechanisms, and dispute resolution. Kautilya emphasizes that tax collectors should combine firmness with fairness, ensuring compliance while avoiding harassment. The Arthashastra prescribes severe punishments for corrupt tax collectors who extract unauthorized payments or abuse taxpayers, demonstrating awareness that unchecked tax administration power creates opportunities for exploitation that undermine both revenue collection and public trust.

The concept of 'Kosh-Samruddhi' (treasury prosperity) in the Arthashastra encompasses not merely revenue collection but comprehensive fiscal management including expenditure control, debt management, and reserve accumulation. Kautilya advocates maintaining substantial treasury reserves to address emergencies, seize opportunities, and demonstrate state capacity. However, the text also warns against excessive accumulation that removes resources from

productive circulation, recognizing the economic principle that money hoarded is money wasted.

Kautilya's treatment of public debt demonstrates nuanced understanding of deficit financing. The Arthashastra acknowledges that borrowing may be necessary to address emergencies or finance productive investments whose returns exceed borrowing costs. However, the text establishes strict principles for debt management including that borrowing should finance investments rather than consumption, debt service costs should remain sustainable relative to revenue, and repayment capacity should be carefully assessed before incurring obligations. These principles anticipate modern public finance concerns about debt sustainability and the distinction between productive and consumptive debt.

The Arthashastra's discussion of monetary policy addresses issues of currency stability, inflation control, and exchange rate management with surprising sophistication. Kautilya recognizes that currency debasement - reducing precious metal content while maintaining nominal value - provides short-term revenue but undermines long-term economic stability by eroding trust and distorting price signals. The text advocates maintaining currency standards and prosecuting counterfeiters to preserve monetary integrity, demonstrating understanding of money's function as store of value and medium of exchange requiring public confidence.

### **Modern Applications in Corporate Financial Planning**

Translating Kautilya's treasury management principles into contemporary corporate financial planning demonstrates their continuing relevance and practical value. Modern corporations face challenges of revenue optimization, cost management, capital allocation, and financial stability that parallel the fiscal management challenges addressed in the Arthashastra.

The principle of diversified revenue sources articulated in the Arthashastra offers guidance for corporate revenue management. Just as Kautilya advocated multiple revenue streams to reduce vulnerability to fluctuations in any single source, modern corporations benefit from revenue diversification across products, markets, and customer segments. Companies overly dependent on single products or customers face risks comparable to kingdoms dependent on single revenue sources - both suffer when their primary source encounters difficulties.

Kautilya's emphasis on moderate taxation to preserve productive capacity translates into corporate contexts as prudent pricing strategies that balance profit extraction with customer value creation. Companies that maximize short-term profits through aggressive pricing risk destroying long-term customer relationships and market positions, similar to how excessive taxation destroys economic

productive capacity. The principle suggests that sustainable corporate profitability requires leaving adequate value for customers, analogous to leaving adequate resources for taxpayers.

The Arthashastra's treatment of expenditure management offers valuable insights for corporate cost control. Kautilya's distinction between productive and consumptive expenditure parallels modern distinctions between capital investments and operating expenses. The principle that expenditure should prioritize capacity-building over immediate consumption suggests that corporations should invest in research, development, employee capabilities, and infrastructure that generate long-term benefits rather than focusing exclusively on short-term cost reduction.

The concept of treasury reserves advocated in the Arthashastra translates into modern corporate contexts as prudent liquidity management and capital adequacy. Corporations maintaining substantial cash reserves and unused credit capacity possess flexibility to address unexpected challenges and capitalize on strategic opportunities. However, excessive reserves represent inefficient capital deployment that reduces returns to investors - the same tension Kautilya identified between security and productivity in treasury management.

Kautilya's principles for debt management offer clear guidance for corporate capital structure decisions. The Arthashastra's emphasis that borrowing should finance productive investments rather than consumption supports the corporate finance principle that debt should fund projects generating returns exceeding borrowing costs. The text's concern for debt service sustainability parallels modern concerns about debt ratios and coverage ratios that ensure companies can meet obligations without financial distress.

The Arthashastra's sophisticated approach to accountability and fraud prevention in treasury management provides frameworks for modern corporate financial controls. Kautilya prescribes detailed record-keeping, separation of duties, periodic audits, and severe consequences for financial misconduct - principles that parallel contemporary internal control frameworks and corporate governance standards. Organizations implementing these ancient principles report enhanced financial integrity, reduced fraud, and stronger stakeholder trust.

#### **4. Dhan-Dharma: Righteous Wealth Creation and Distribution**

The concept of Dhan-Dharma represents a fundamental principle of Dharmic Finance that establishes wealth creation and accumulation as legitimate objectives only when conducted righteously and directed toward beneficial purposes. This principle challenges contemporary financial practices that treat profit maximization as self-justifying regardless of means or social consequences.

## **Ethical Investment and Lending Practices**

Dhan-Dharma principles establish clear standards for ethical investment and lending practices that transcend conventional risk-return optimization frameworks. Ancient Indian texts distinguish between 'Sattvic Artha' (righteous wealth) and 'Tamasic Artha' (tainted wealth), establishing that the means of wealth acquisition determine its ultimate value regardless of monetary amount. This distinction challenges modern investment practices that focus exclusively on financial returns while ignoring the ethical character of underlying activities.

The principle of 'Ahimsa' (non-violence) extends to financial contexts as requiring that investment and lending activities avoid causing harm to people, communities, or environment. This principle provides philosophical foundation for negative screening in ethical investing - excluding industries like weapons manufacturing, exploitative labor practices, or environmentally destructive activities from investment portfolios. However, Dhan-Dharma goes beyond negative screening to actively promote positive impact through investments that create social value, enhance community welfare, and support environmental sustainability.

Ancient Indian lending practices, documented in texts like Manu Smriti and various Dharmashastra texts, establish bilateral ethical obligations for both lenders and borrowers. Lenders have duties to assess borrower capacity honestly, charge reasonable interest rates, and show compassion in cases of genuine hardship. Borrowers have corresponding duties to repay obligations faithfully, use borrowed funds productively, and communicate honestly about difficulties. This bilateral framework contrasts with modern credit relationships that emphasize lender rights while marginalizing ethical responsibilities.

The concept of 'Kusidin' (usurious lending) is explicitly condemned in ancient Indian texts, which recognize that excessive interest rates exploit borrower vulnerability and create debt traps that impoverish rather than empower. Various classical texts establish limits on interest rates ranging from 12% to 60% annually depending on borrower circumstances, collateral, and purpose. While specific rates reflect ancient economic conditions, the underlying principle - that interest rates should compensate for risk and opportunity cost without exploiting borrower distress - remains relevant for contemporary lending practices.

The principle of 'Rinn-mukti' (debt forgiveness) articulated in ancient Indian texts recognizes that rigid enforcement of debt obligations regardless of circumstances can create social harm exceeding creditor losses. Classical texts prescribe periodic debt forgiveness for borrowers facing genuine hardship beyond their control, anticipating modern bankruptcy provisions and debt relief mechanisms. This principle establishes that financial systems should balance legitimate creditor interests with borrower dignity and social welfare.

The ancient Indian practice of 'Dana' (charitable giving) establishes wealth circulation as essential aspect of righteous wealth management. Classical texts prescribe that wealthy individuals should dedicate portions of income to charitable purposes including supporting education, healthcare, religious institutions, and poverty relief. This principle recognizes that excessive wealth concentration creates social instability while appropriate circulation generates collective prosperity. Modern applications include corporate philanthropy, impact investing, and social entrepreneurship that deploy capital for social benefit alongside financial return.

### **Sustainable Business Financing Models**

Dhan-Dharma principles offer frameworks for sustainable business financing that balance multiple stakeholder interests and long-term value creation. Contemporary business financing, dominated by venture capital and private equity models emphasizing rapid growth and maximum returns, often pressures companies toward unsustainable practices that sacrifice long-term stability for short-term gains. Dharmic Finance principles suggest alternative approaches that prioritize sustainable growth, stakeholder welfare, and ethical conduct.

The concept of 'Sahakara' (cooperation) from ancient Indian economic organization suggests financing models based on mutual support rather than purely extractive capital relationships. Traditional Indian business financing often involved partnerships where capital providers shared risks and rewards more equitably with entrepreneurs and participated actively in business governance. This partnership approach contrasts with modern debt and equity financing that creates hierarchical relationships privileging capital providers over operating partners.

The principle of 'Swadeshi' (self-reliance and local economic circulation) from ancient Indian economic thought suggests financing models that prioritize local capital mobilization and deployment. Rather than depending exclusively on external capital sources that extract value from communities, Swadeshi principles advocate developing local savings, investment, and financing mechanisms that retain wealth within communities while financing local enterprises. Modern applications include community development financial institutions, local investment funds, and cooperative financing mechanisms.

Ancient Indian concepts of 'Yajna' (sacrifice or contribution) suggest that capital deployment should serve broader social purposes beyond individual returns. This principle supports impact investing frameworks that accept below-market financial returns in exchange for measurable social or environmental benefits. Organizations implementing Yajna principles in financing report that capital accepting social

returns alongside financial returns enables business models addressing market failures and serving marginalized populations otherwise excluded from conventional financing.

The concept of 'Aparigraha' (non-possessiveness) from Jain and Yogic philosophy establishes limits on wealth accumulation and consumption as expression of spiritual wisdom and social responsibility. Applied to business financing, this principle challenges growth-at-any-cost mentalities that drive unsustainable expansion and resource exploitation. Instead, Aparigraha suggests that businesses should pursue optimal rather than maximal scale, recognizing that beyond certain points additional growth generates diminishing returns while creating increased risks and negative externalities.

## **5. Indigenous Banking Systems: Shreni and Community Finance**

Ancient India possessed sophisticated indigenous banking systems that operated for centuries before colonial disruption. These systems, exemplified by institutions like Shreni (merchant guilds) and community-based financial intermediaries, demonstrate how traditional Indian finance emphasized relationship-based banking, community welfare, and ethical capital allocation.

### **Traditional Indian Financial Institutions and Their Governance**

The Shreni system represented one of the most developed forms of indigenous banking and commercial organization in ancient India. Shrenis functioned as self-governing associations of merchants and artisans engaged in particular trades or industries. Beyond their primary functions as trade associations, Shrenis performed sophisticated financial intermediation including accepting deposits, providing loans, financing commercial ventures, and facilitating payments.

The governance structure of Shrenis demonstrates remarkable sophistication in balancing multiple objectives and stakeholder interests. Shrenis were governed by elected councils representing member interests while maintaining accountability to broader community welfare. Decisions regarding lending, investment, and fund management required council deliberation and approval, preventing individual control while ensuring informed collective judgment. This governance model anticipates modern cooperative financial institutions by over two millennia.

Shrenis accepted deposits from members and non-members, paying interest on deposits and employing funds for lending and investment. Interest rates on deposits and loans varied based on term, purpose, and relationship, with Shrenis typically offering preferential terms to members compared to outsiders. This differential pricing reflected the mutual-benefit nature of Shrenis while acknowledging that non-member transactions required compensation for increased risk and reduced relationship monitoring.

The lending practices of Shrenis demonstrate emphasis on relationship-based credit assessment rather than purely formulaic approaches. Shrenis extended credit based on holistic evaluation of borrower character, capacity, collateral, and community standing. This approach recognized that creditworthiness depends on factors beyond financial statements and physical collateral, including reputation, social capital, and ethical conduct. Modern microfinance institutions rediscovering relationship-based lending report outcomes validating ancient Shreni practices. Shrenis also performed crucial functions in trade finance, providing mechanisms for merchants to finance inventories, facilitate long-distance trade, and manage commercial risks. The Shreni system included sophisticated instruments like 'Hundi' (bill of exchange) that enabled payment settlements across distances without physical currency transfer. These instruments, developed in ancient India and continuing through medieval and early modern periods, demonstrate financial innovation comparable to contemporary instruments for international trade finance.

The concept of 'Nagaraseth' (city banker) represents another important indigenous financial institution. Nagaraseths functioned as community bankers who combined financial intermediation with social leadership and philanthropic responsibilities. Unlike modern bankers focused exclusively on financial transactions, Nagaraseths served as trusted financial advisors, dispute mediators, and community benefactors. This integrated role reflected understanding that financial relationships exist within broader social contexts and that financial institutions bear responsibilities beyond profit maximization.

The governance of Nagaraseth institutions emphasized personal reputation and community accountability. Nagaraseths maintained their positions through demonstrated integrity, financial acumen, and community service rather than through formal ownership structures or capital contributions. Loss of community trust resulted in loss of business and social standing, creating powerful incentives for ethical conduct that complemented formal regulations.

### **Lessons for Modern Cooperative and Microfinance Sectors**

The indigenous banking systems of ancient India offer valuable lessons for contemporary cooperative financial institutions and microfinance organizations seeking alternatives to conventional commercial banking models. These lessons address fundamental questions about governance, lending practices, community engagement, and social purpose that remain central to cooperative and development finance.

**First**, the Shreni model demonstrates the viability of member-owned financial institutions governed democratically while maintaining financial sustainability. Modern cooperative banks and credit unions following similar principles report

strong member loyalty, lower default rates, and greater community integration compared to commercial banks. The key insight from Shreni experience is that shared ownership creates mutual accountability that reduces information asymmetries and agency problems plaguing conventional financial intermediation. **Second**, Shreni lending practices validate relationship-based credit assessment as complement or alternative to conventional collateral-based lending. Microfinance institutions employing group lending, character-based assessment, and social collateral mechanisms report success in serving populations excluded from conventional finance. These practices resonate with ancient Indian recognition that creditworthiness encompasses social capital, reputation, and community standing alongside financial metrics and physical assets.

**Third**, the integration of financial services with broader community engagement observed in Nagaraseth institutions offers models for community development financial institutions. Organizations combining financial intermediation with technical assistance, business development support, and social services report enhanced impact and sustainability. This integrated approach recognizes that financial access alone proves insufficient for economic empowerment without complementary supports addressing knowledge gaps, market access, and social barriers.

**Fourth**, the emphasis on ethical conduct and community accountability in indigenous financial institutions provides alternatives to regulatory compliance as primary mechanism ensuring responsible finance. While formal regulations remain necessary, the ancient Indian emphasis on reputation, social sanctions, and internalized ethical commitments creates complementary accountability mechanisms that may prove more effective for preventing misconduct than external enforcement alone.

**Fifth**, the indigenous banking systems' long-term sustainability over centuries demonstrates that financial institutions can maintain viability while pursuing social objectives beyond profit maximization. This experience challenges assumptions that community-oriented financial institutions inevitably face tradeoffs between financial sustainability and social mission. Instead, the Shreni experience suggests that institutions deeply embedded in community relationships and governed for member benefit may achieve superior long-term sustainability compared to purely profit-driven competitors.

## **6. Rinn-Dharma: Sacred Obligations and Debt Management**

The concept of Rinn-Dharma in ancient Indian thought establishes debt not merely as financial obligation but as sacred responsibility encompassing moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. This comprehensive understanding of debt relationships

offers profound insights for contemporary credit risk management and debtor-creditor relationships.

### **Ancient Indian Concepts of Debt and Credit**

Classical Indian texts identify several categories of debt extending far beyond financial obligations. The concept of 'Pitra Rinn' (debt to ancestors) establishes that individuals owe obligations to previous generations who provided life, culture, and heritage. The concept of 'Deva Rinn' (debt to divine forces) recognizes obligations to cosmic and natural forces that sustain existence. The concept of 'Rishi Rinn' (debt to teachers and sages) acknowledges obligations to those who provided knowledge and wisdom. These non-financial debts establish human existence within networks of reciprocal obligations that transcend purely economic calculations.

Financial debts, designated as 'Dhana Rinn,' are understood within this broader framework of reciprocal obligations. Ancient texts establish clear principles governing proper debt relationships including that borrowing should serve productive purposes rather than consumption, borrowed resources should be employed responsibly and efficiently, and repayment obligations should be honored faithfully. These principles recognize that debt relationships involve trust and mutual responsibility requiring ethical conduct from both parties.

The classification of interest rates and debt terms in ancient texts demonstrates sophisticated understanding of credit pricing and risk assessment. The Manu Smriti and various Dharmashastra texts prescribe different interest rates for different types of loans based on factors including purpose (commercial versus consumption), security (secured versus unsecured), and borrower risk (established versus unknown). This risk-based pricing anticipates modern credit risk management by over two millennia while maintaining ethical constraints preventing exploitative rates.

Ancient Indian texts also address debt collection practices with emphasis on balance between creditor rights and debtor dignity. While recognizing legitimate creditor interests in timely repayment, classical texts establish limits on collection methods prohibiting violence, excessive harassment, and seizure of essential assets required for survival. The principle of 'Rinn-anubandhana' (debt bondage prohibition) establishes that debt obligations cannot justify perpetual servitude or loss of fundamental human dignity, anticipating modern bankruptcy protections and debtor rights.

The concept of 'Rinn-samyojana' (debt restructuring) in ancient texts recognizes that circumstances beyond borrower control may impair repayment capacity, requiring flexible responses rather than rigid enforcement. Classical texts prescribe

mechanisms for extending payment terms, reducing interest burdens, or even forgiving portions of obligations in cases of genuine hardship arising from natural disasters, illness, or other misfortunes. These provisions recognize that financial systems serve human welfare rather than existing as ends in themselves.

### **Applications in Modern Credit Risk Management**

Translating Rinn-Dharma principles into contemporary credit risk management offers frameworks for more sustainable and ethical lending practices that balance financial prudence with social responsibility. Modern credit systems, characterized by standardized underwriting, formulaic risk assessment, and aggressive collection practices, often fail to recognize the human dimensions of debt relationships that ancient Indian wisdom emphasized.

The principle of purposeful lending articulated in Rinn-Dharma suggests that credit risk assessment should evaluate not merely borrower capacity to repay but also the productive purpose of borrowing. Loans financing productive investments, skill development, or income-generating activities deserve more favorable consideration than loans financing consumption or speculation. Financial institutions implementing purpose-based lending criteria report lower default rates and stronger developmental impacts, validating the ancient wisdom that productive debt differs fundamentally from consumptive debt.

The emphasis on bilateral ethical obligations in Rinn-Dharma challenges modern credit relationships where responsibilities fall overwhelmingly on borrowers while lenders face minimal accountability for predatory practices, inadequate disclosure, or irresponsible lending. Implementing Dharmic principles requires that financial institutions assess their own responsibilities including verifying borrower understanding of terms, ensuring loan amounts align with repayment capacity, and providing transparent disclosure of all costs and risks. Regulations implementing responsible lending standards reflect growing recognition of lender obligations anticipated in ancient Indian debt ethics.

The concept of compassionate collection practices from Rinn-Dharma offers guidance for modern debt recovery operations. While recognizing legitimate creditor interests in recovering loans, Dharmic principles establish that collection methods must respect borrower dignity and consider circumstances beyond their control. Financial institutions implementing these principles develop collection policies that distinguish between unwilling defaulters deserving aggressive action and distressed borrowers requiring restructuring support. This differentiated approach often achieves better recovery outcomes while maintaining ethical standards and customer relationships.

The principle of debt forgiveness in cases of genuine hardship translates into modern contexts as bankruptcy protections, debt relief programs, and restructuring mechanisms that recognize some obligations cannot be sustainably maintained. While contemporary financial systems have developed such mechanisms, they often apply only after severe financial distress has devastated borrower welfare. Dharmic principles suggest earlier intervention when distress signals emerge, preventing escalation to crisis while protecting both creditor interests and borrower wellbeing.

The concept of collective credit assessment from Shreni traditions offers alternatives to purely individual-focused credit scoring. Group lending methodologies employed in microfinance, where groups guarantee member obligations, operationalize this principle by substituting social capital and peer monitoring for conventional collateral. These approaches have successfully extended credit access to millions previously excluded from formal finance, validating ancient wisdom about community-based credit assessment.

### **7. Yajna-Arthaneeti: Circular Economics and Wealth Circulation**

The concept of Yajna-Arthaneeti, drawing from the Vedic principle of Yajna (sacrifice or ritual offering), establishes economic activity as circular process where wealth should flow among all participants rather than accumulating indefinitely with few. This principle offers profound insights for addressing contemporary challenges of inequality, stagnant demand, and concentrated economic power.

#### **Traditional Indian Concepts of Economic Flow**

The Yajna principle in Vedic philosophy establishes that prosperity depends on continuous circulation and reciprocal exchange among all elements of cosmic and social order. In the Yajna ritual, offerings flow from humans to deities, from deities back to nature, from nature to humans in forms like rain and crops, completing cycles of reciprocal giving that sustain existence. Applied to economic contexts, Yajna-Arthaneeti establishes that sustainable prosperity requires wealth circulation among all economic participants rather than unidirectional extraction or accumulation.

The Bhagavad Gita articulates this principle explicitly, stating that those who enjoy wealth without reciprocal contribution to collective welfare live in vain. This teaching establishes economic participation as involving both receiving and giving, both earning and contributing. The text emphasizes that hoarding wealth breaks the cycles of circulation that enable collective prosperity, similar to how blocked blood circulation causes bodily dysfunction.

Ancient Indian economic practices institutionalized Yajna principles through various mechanisms ensuring wealth circulation. The concept of 'Dana' (charitable giving) established that wealthy individuals had duties to support religious institutions, educational facilities, healthcare services, and poverty relief. Various texts prescribe specific proportions of income or wealth for charitable purposes, typically ranging from one-tenth to one-third depending on wealth level and circumstances. These prescriptions recognize that wealth concentration beyond certain thresholds serves no productive purpose while its circulation generates collective benefits.

The institution of 'Annadana' (food distribution) represented another mechanism for wealth circulation. Wealthy households and institutions regularly distributed food to the needy, ensuring that basic subsistence needs were met regardless of market capacity. This practice recognized that market mechanisms alone prove insufficient for ensuring universal access to essential goods, requiring complementary distribution systems based on need rather than purchasing power. The concept of 'Atithi-seva' (hospitality to guests and travellers) established social obligations to share resources with visitors, recognizing that travel and exchange require mechanisms for resource access beyond market transactions. This practice facilitated commercial travel, pilgrimage, and cultural exchange while distributing resources more widely than pure market mechanisms would achieve.

Temple economics in ancient India exemplified Yajna-Arthaneeti principles through their roles as economic redistributive institutions. Temples received donations from wealthy patrons and deployed these resources for various purposes including religious activities, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, agricultural development, and poverty relief. This intermediation function enabled wealth transfer from surplus to deficit sectors while maintaining social harmony and legitimacy.

### **Modern Applications in CSR and Impact Investing**

Contemporary applications of Yajna-Arthaneeti principles include corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, impact investing, and various mechanisms for redirecting private wealth toward social purposes. However, modern implementations often remain peripheral to core business operations rather than integral to economic models as Yajna principles suggest.

The principle of mandatory CSR expenditure implemented in Indian corporate law represents partial operationalization of Yajna-Arthaneeti. Requiring corporations above certain size thresholds to spend specified percentages of profits on social development reflects recognition that business success creates obligations to contribute to collective welfare. However, the effectiveness of CSR

mandates depends on implementation quality, with genuine developmental investments producing far greater social value than token compliance activities.

Impact investing, which seeks measurable social or environmental returns alongside financial returns, resonates strongly with Yajna-Arthaneeti principles. Unlike conventional investing focused exclusively on financial returns or philanthropy focused on charitable giving without return expectations, impact investing recognizes that capital deployment can simultaneously serve multiple purposes including financial sustainability and social benefit. Organizations implementing impact investing principles report that accepting below-market financial returns enables business models serving populations and purposes that conventional finance cannot address profitably.

The concept of patient capital, which accepts longer time horizons and lower immediate returns in exchange for sustainable long-term value creation, operationalizes Yajna principles by resisting pressure for rapid wealth extraction. Patient capital enables enterprises to build capabilities, develop markets, and create social value that quick-return capital would abandon as insufficiently profitable. This approach recognizes that sustainable prosperity often requires extended investment periods that market impatience precludes.

Social entrepreneurship, which employs business methods to address social problems, represents another application of Yajna-Arthaneeti. Rather than relying exclusively on charity or government programs, social enterprises create sustainable business models that generate revenue while serving social missions. This approach operationalizes the Yajna principle that economic activity should serve collective welfare while maintaining financial sustainability through reciprocal exchanges.

The concept of stakeholder value optimization, which seeks to balance returns to all stakeholders rather than maximizing shareholder value alone, reflects Yajna-Arthaneeti's emphasis on circular benefit flows. Organizations implementing stakeholder value approaches report that treating employees, customers, suppliers, and communities as value recipients rather than cost sources generates stronger long-term performance through enhanced loyalty, collaboration, and reputation.

## **8. Case Studies: Dharmic Finance in Contemporary Indian Institutions**

The practical viability of Dharmic Finance principles is demonstrated through their successful implementation by leading Indian financial institutions. These case studies illustrate how ancient wisdom can drive contemporary financial excellence while maintaining ethical standards and social responsibility.

### **HDFC Bank: Building Trust Through Traditional Values**

HDFC Bank, established in 1994, has emerged as one of India's most successful and respected financial institutions by explicitly incorporating traditional Indian values into its operational philosophy and institutional culture. The bank's emphasis on relationship banking, conservative risk management, and long-term stakeholder value reflects Dharmic Finance principles adapted to contemporary banking contexts. The bank's founding philosophy, articulated by its visionary leadership, emphasized building an institution based on trust, integrity, and customer service rather than aggressive growth or profit maximization. This approach reflects the Rinn-Dharma principle that financial relationships involve sacred trust requiring ethical conduct from financial intermediaries. HDFC Bank's consistent emphasis on ethical banking practices and transparent dealings has generated extraordinary customer loyalty and institutional stability.

HDFC Bank's approach to credit risk management demonstrates Dharmic principles in practice. Rather than relying exclusively on automated credit scoring and standardized underwriting, the bank emphasizes relationship-based lending where branch managers possess authority to evaluate borrowers holistically including character, community standing, and business fundamentals alongside financial metrics. This approach resonates with ancient Shreni practices of community-based credit assessment and has enabled the bank to maintain among the lowest non-performing asset ratios in Indian banking despite serving diverse customer segments.

The bank's human resource practices reflect Svadharma principles through emphasis on employee development, career progression, and work-life balance. HDFC Bank invests heavily in training programs, leadership development, and employee welfare, recognizing that institutional excellence depends upon human capital quality. The bank's low employee turnover and strong organizational culture demonstrate that ethical treatment of employees generates business benefits alongside fulfilling organizational duties.

Customer service philosophy at HDFC Bank exemplifies Seva-Bhava principles through emphasis on treating customers with respect and dignity regardless of transaction size or account balance. The bank's customer service ratings consistently rank among industry leaders, reflecting genuine commitment to customer welfare rather than token service gestures. Branch staff receive training emphasizing that customer service represents core institutional purpose rather than secondary consideration after profit generation.

Community engagement initiatives at HDFC Bank reflect Lokasangraha principles through sustained investments in financial literacy programs, rural banking expansion, and support for small businesses and agricultural finance. These initiatives recognize that financial institutions bear responsibilities to contribute

to broader economic development rather than merely extracting profits from existing markets. The bank's extensive rural and semi-urban presence, often in areas where commercial viability remains questionable, demonstrates commitment to inclusive finance transcending pure profit calculations.

### **ICICI Bank: Technology-Enabled Traditional Banking**

ICICI Bank represents another exemplar of Dharmic Finance principles adapted to contemporary contexts, particularly demonstrating how technology can enable traditional banking values rather than displacing them. The bank has pioneered various digital banking innovations while maintaining emphasis on customer relationships, ethical conduct, and social responsibility.

The bank's approach to financial inclusion through technology demonstrates how modern tools can operationalize ancient principles of accessible and equitable finance. ICICI Bank's investments in digital banking platforms, mobile banking applications, and agent banking networks have extended financial services to populations previously excluded from formal banking. This commitment to inclusive access reflects Dharmic principles establishing that financial systems should serve all community members rather than only wealthy or urban populations.

ICICI Bank's emphasis on transparent pricing and disclosure practices reflects the Satya (truth) principle from Dharmic philosophy. The bank provides clear information about fees, charges, and terms, enabling customers to make informed decisions rather than discovering unexpected costs after commitment. This transparency, unusual in financial services industries often characterized by hidden fees and complex terms, has generated customer trust and loyalty that translate into business advantage.

The bank's approach to corporate governance demonstrates implementation of accountability mechanisms emphasized in ancient texts like the Arthashastra. ICICI Bank maintains robust board oversight, independent audit functions, and comprehensive risk management systems that prevent concentration of power and ensure accountability. These mechanisms have enabled the bank to navigate various challenges while maintaining institutional integrity and stakeholder confidence.

Employee practices at ICICI Bank reflect recognition that organizational excellence depends upon human capital development and ethical conduct. The bank's comprehensive training programs, merit-based advancement, and emphasis on ethical behavior create organizational culture where employees perceive themselves as professionals serving important social functions rather than merely as employees pursuing personal compensation. This culture generates institutional

loyalty and reduces agency problems that plague financial institutions lacking strong ethical foundations.

### **Cooperative Banking: Operationalizing Community Finance Principles**

India's cooperative banking sector, comprising thousands of institutions ranging from small credit societies to large cooperative banks, demonstrates sustained operationalization of indigenous financial principles over extended periods. These institutions, often dismissed as technologically backward or financially unsophisticated, have achieved remarkable success in serving communities underserved by commercial banks while maintaining financial sustainability and social mission. The cooperative banking model directly operationalizes ancient Shreni principles through member ownership, democratic governance, and community focus. Members simultaneously function as owners, customers, and overseers, creating alignment of interests that reduces agency problems and information asymmetries characteristic of conventional banks. This governance structure enables cooperative banks to serve members based on holistic understanding of their circumstances rather than standardized formulas applied impersonally.

Cooperative banks' lending practices demonstrate relationship-based credit assessment emphasized in traditional Indian banking. Loan decisions incorporate local knowledge about borrower character, family circumstances, and community standing alongside financial metrics and collateral. This approach enables cooperative banks to extend credit to borrowers who would be rejected by formulaic commercial bank underwriting while maintaining low default rates through community accountability and social sanctions. The financial performance of well-managed cooperative banks challenges assumptions that community-oriented financial institutions face inevitable tradeoffs between social mission and financial sustainability. Many cooperative banks maintain profitability, capital adequacy, and asset quality comparable to commercial banks while serving social objectives including financial inclusion, rural development, and agricultural finance. This experience validates Dharmic Finance principles that righteous financial practices can generate sustainable prosperity.

However, cooperative banking also illustrates implementation challenges when institutional mechanisms fail to maintain ethical standards. Some cooperative banks have experienced governance failures, politicization, and financial mismanagement when accountability mechanisms broke down and self-interested actors captured institutional control. These negative experiences demonstrate that Dharmic principles require not merely philosophical commitment but robust institutional mechanisms ensuring accountability and preventing abuse.

## **9. Digital Dharma: Technology-Enabled Traditional Finance**

The convergence of ancient financial wisdom with contemporary technology offers unprecedented opportunities for implementing Dharmic Finance principles at scale while adapting them to modern contexts. Blockchain, artificial intelligence, mobile technology, and other digital innovations can facilitate traditional financial values rather than displacing them.

### **Fintech Applications of Ancient Financial Principles**

Financial technology innovations enable implementation of Dharmic Finance principles in ways previously impractical due to information costs, transaction costs, and monitoring limitations. These technologies can operationalize traditional wisdom that remained aspirational when implementation costs exceeded benefits. Blockchain technology offers particular promise for implementing transparency and accountability principles emphasized in texts like the Arthashastra. Distributed ledger systems create immutable records of transactions visible to relevant stakeholders, preventing hidden activities and enabling verification. This transparency operationalizes the Satya (truth) principle by making financial activities observable and accountable rather than obscure and opaque. Smart contracts - self-executing agreements coded on blockchain platforms - can operationalize Dharmic principles governing debt relationships and financial obligations. For example, smart contracts can automatically implement debt restructuring provisions when specified hardship conditions occur, operationalizing the Rinn-mukti (debt forgiveness) principle without requiring discretionary decisions vulnerable to bias or capture. Similarly, smart contracts can enforce ethical constraints on lending terms, preventing exploitative practices through technological guardrails.

Artificial intelligence applications can facilitate relationship-based credit assessment emphasized in traditional Indian banking while overcoming scalability limitations. Machine learning algorithms can analyze diverse data sources including transaction patterns, social network information, and behavioral indicators to assess creditworthiness holistically rather than relying exclusively on credit scores and collateral. This technological capability enables financial institutions to serve populations lacking conventional credit histories while maintaining risk management discipline. Mobile banking technology enables financial inclusion objectives central to Dharmic Finance principles. Mobile platforms extend banking services to remote and underserved populations at costs far lower than traditional branch banking, operationalizing the principle that financial systems should serve all community members. India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) demonstrates how digital infrastructure can democratize financial access, enabling even small merchants and rural residents to participate in formal financial systems. Peer-to-peer lending platforms operationalize aspects of

traditional Shreni models by directly connecting lenders and borrowers without conventional bank intermediation. These platforms can incorporate ethical criteria, social connections, and community oversight into lending decisions, combining technological efficiency with traditional emphasis on relationships and shared responsibility. However, P2P platforms also face challenges regarding accountability, risk management, and borrower protection requiring careful regulatory frameworks.

### **Blockchain and Traditional Indian Financial Concepts**

Blockchain technology demonstrates particular compatibility with traditional Indian financial concepts, suggesting technological enablement rather than displacement of ancient wisdom. The distributed, transparent, and immutable characteristics of blockchain align remarkably with Dharmic principles of truth, accountability, and community governance. The concept of distributed consensus in blockchain systems resonates with traditional Indian emphasis on community-based decision-making and collective governance. Rather than concentrating control in centralized authorities, blockchain enables communities to collectively validate transactions and govern systems, similar to how Shreni governance distributed decision-making among members. This distributed model reduces concentration risks and abuse opportunities while maintaining operational efficiency.

Cryptocurrency and tokenization technologies can operationalize traditional concepts of community currencies and localized exchange systems. Ancient Indian economic history includes various examples of local currencies and exchange mechanisms that facilitated commerce within communities while limiting external value extraction. Digital tokens can create modern analogues enabling communities to capture value from internal economic activity while participating in broader markets. Decentralized finance (DeFi) protocols implementing automated financial services through smart contracts offer potential to operationalize Yajna-Arthaneeti principles of circular economics. DeFi systems can encode rules ensuring that value capture generates corresponding contributions to collective goods, that excess accumulation triggers redistributive mechanisms, and that all participants receive fair shares of system benefits. However, realizing this potential requires intentional design incorporating Dharmic principles rather than purely profit-maximizing algorithms.

The transparency and immutability of blockchain systems operationalize accountability mechanisms emphasized in Arthashastra. Financial activities recorded on blockchain become permanently observable, enabling stakeholders to verify ethical conduct and detect misconduct. This technological accountability complements traditional emphasis on reputation and social sanctions by making malfeasance objectively demonstrable rather than dependent on contested

testimony. However, blockchain applications in finance also present challenges requiring careful consideration from Dharmic perspectives. The pseudonymous nature of many blockchain systems can enable unethical activities by obscuring actor identities, conflicting with Dharmic emphasis on accountability and responsibility. The energy consumption of some blockchain systems raises environmental concerns conflicting with Dharmic principles of environmental stewardship. The speculative dynamics of cryptocurrency markets often contradict Dharmic emphasis on productive wealth creation over speculative accumulation. Addressing these tensions requires thoughtful implementation ensuring technology serves Dharmic principles rather than undermining them.

## **10. Conclusion: Roadmap for Dharmic Financial Education and Regulation**

The integration of Dharmic Finance principles into contemporary financial practice requires systematic efforts in education, professional development, regulatory reform, and institutional innovation. This concluding section outlines a comprehensive roadmap for advancing this transformative agenda.

### **Curriculum Development for Finance Programs**

Financial education represents a crucial leverage point for mainstreaming Dharmic Finance principles. Current finance curricula, dominated by Western theories and quantitative techniques, provide minimal exposure to indigenous financial philosophies or ethical frameworks grounded in cultural traditions. Integrating Dharmic Finance into business education requires several strategic initiatives.

**First**, developing foundational courses on Indian Knowledge Systems and financial ethics provides systematic introduction to philosophical principles, classical texts, and contemporary applications. These courses should combine rigorous scholarly analysis of Sanskrit texts with practical relevance demonstrating how ancient wisdom addresses modern financial challenges. Students should engage directly with texts like Arthashastra, Mahabharata, and Dharmashastra literature to appreciate the sophistication and depth of traditional Indian financial thought.

**Second**, integrating Dharmic perspectives into existing finance courses enriches conventional financial education with ethical and philosophical dimensions. Corporate finance courses can incorporate Dhan-Dharma principles for capital structure decisions and dividend policies. Investment courses can explore ethical investing frameworks grounded in Ahimsa and Aparigraha principles. Banking courses can examine Shreni models alongside conventional commercial banking. Risk management courses can incorporate Rinn-Dharma perspectives on credit relationships and debt management.

**Third**, developing comprehensive case studies documenting Dharmic Finance implementations provides concrete examples for analysis and discussion. Cases examining HDFC Bank's relationship banking, ICICI Bank's financial inclusion initiatives, cooperative banks' community finance models, and ethical investment

funds' screening processes enable experiential learning about practical applications, implementation challenges, and measurable outcomes. Case studies should document both successes and failures to provide balanced understanding of opportunities and limitations.

**Fourth**, incorporating experiential learning through internships, field projects, and practitioner interactions connects theoretical knowledge with practical application. Students should engage with financial institutions implementing Dharmic principles, traditional cooperative societies maintaining indigenous practices, and social enterprises employing innovative financing models. These experiences develop practical skills while demonstrating that Dharmic Finance represents viable approach rather than merely philosophical ideal.

**Fifth**, supporting faculty research investigating Dharmic Finance effectiveness, cross-cultural adaptation, and contemporary relevance builds scholarly foundations for the field. Research programs should address questions including whether Dharmic Finance principles generate superior long-term performance, how traditional principles adapt across cultural contexts, what institutional mechanisms effectively implement philosophical principles, and how technology enables Dharmic Finance at scale. Rigorous empirical research legitimizes the field while identifying best practices and implementation guidelines.

### **Policy Recommendations and Regulatory Framework Integration**

Beyond education, realizing Dharmic Finance potential requires supportive policy environments and regulatory frameworks that encourage rather than obstruct ethical financial practices. Current financial regulations, largely imported from Western contexts, often implicitly assume shareholder primacy and profit maximization as primary objectives while treating ethical and social considerations as constraints or compliance requirements. Developing regulatory frameworks aligned with Dharmic Finance requires several strategic reforms.

**First**, corporate governance regulations should explicitly recognize stakeholder welfare as legitimate corporate objective alongside shareholder returns. Current regulations emphasizing fiduciary duties to shareholders can be interpreted as prohibiting consideration of other stakeholder interests. Dharmic principles suggest that regulations should require rather than merely permit consideration of employee welfare, customer interests, community impacts, and environmental sustainability in corporate decision-making. Some jurisdictions have begun developing stakeholder governance frameworks, and these initiatives deserve acceleration and expansion.

**Second**, financial institution regulations should explicitly encourage relationship-based lending and community-focused banking alongside standardized underwriting. Current Basel framework regulations emphasizing statistical risk models and standardized approaches may inadvertently discourage traditional Indian banking practices emphasizing relationships and local knowledge.

Regulatory frameworks should recognize relationship-based approaches as legitimate risk management strategies deserving regulatory capital relief when implemented with appropriate governance safeguards.

**Third,** taxation policies should encourage wealth circulation through preferential treatment of charitable giving, impact investing, and other mechanisms for deploying private wealth toward social purposes. Current taxation often penalizes charitable activities or treats impact investments less favorably than conventional investments. Dharmic principles suggest that taxation should encourage Dana (charitable giving) and Yajna (contribution to collective welfare) through deductions, credits, and other incentive mechanisms.

**Fourth,** mandatory disclosure requirements should expand beyond financial metrics to encompass ethical conduct, stakeholder treatment, and social impact. Investors and stakeholders making decisions based on Dharmic principles require information about corporate ethics, labor practices, environmental impacts, and community engagement that conventional financial statements do not provide. Regulatory frameworks should mandate comprehensive ESG disclosure enabling informed decision-making aligned with ethical principles.

**Fifth,** financial institution licensing should recognize cooperative and community-based models as legitimate banking structures deserving regulatory support rather than merely tolerance. Current regulatory frameworks often implicitly favor commercial banking models while imposing disproportionate compliance burdens on cooperative institutions. Dharmic principles suggest that regulations should actively support diverse institutional forms including cooperatives, community banks, and social enterprises that serve financial inclusion and community development objectives.

### **Vision for the Future**

Dharmic Finance represents more than an alternative financial theory; it embodies a comprehensive vision for financial systems that integrate economic prosperity with ethical integrity, individual welfare with collective benefit, and contemporary innovation with timeless wisdom. As global challenges of financial instability, economic inequality, and environmental degradation intensify, the relevance and urgency of Dharmic principles grow commensurately.

The future of Dharmic Finance depends upon sustained efforts across multiple domains. Academic institutions must preserve traditional financial knowledge through rigorous scholarship while demonstrating contemporary relevance through empirical research and case study documentation. Financial institutions must experiment with Dharmic principles, document implementation experiences, and share lessons learned with practitioners and policymakers. Regulatory authorities must develop frameworks that encourage rather than obstruct ethical financial practices while maintaining prudential safeguards. Technology

innovators must design digital financial systems that operationalize traditional wisdom rather than displacing it with purely profit-driven algorithms.

The journey from marginal alternative to mainstream financial paradigm will be gradual but can be transformative if pursued with dedication and wisdom. Early adopters demonstrating superior performance through Dharmic principles will inspire broader implementation. Regulatory reforms creating enabling environments will facilitate scaling. Educational initiatives preparing new generations of ethical financial professionals will ensure sustained momentum. Technological innovations operationalizing ancient principles will enable previously impractical implementations.

This chapter contributes to this important journey by articulating philosophical foundations, demonstrating practical applications, documenting successful implementations, and proposing roadmaps for broader integration. The wisdom preserved in ancient Indian texts represents invaluable heritage not merely for Indian financial institutions but for global financial systems seeking alternatives to failed paradigms. By bridging traditional wisdom with contemporary applications, Dharmic Finance offers hope for creating financial systems that generate prosperity while serving human dignity, social welfare, and environmental sustainability.

The path forward requires patience, commitment, and long-term perspective consistent with Dharmic principles themselves. Short-term metrics and immediate results, while important for demonstrating viability, cannot capture the full value of financial systems aligned with righteousness and serving ultimate human welfare. Success must be measured not merely in profits and returns but in enhanced wellbeing, reduced inequality, strengthened communities, and sustainable prosperity benefiting present and future generations.

As global financial systems confront unprecedented challenges requiring fundamental transformation, ancient Indian financial wisdom offers guidance grounded in millennia of practical experience and philosophical reflection. The principles articulated in texts like Arthashastra, tested through centuries of Shreni operations, and validated in contemporary institutions like HDFC Bank demonstrate that righteous finance is not merely idealistic aspiration but practical approach generating sustainable prosperity. By recovering, adapting, and implementing this wisdom, contemporary financial systems can evolve beyond current crises toward futures embodying both economic success and ethical excellence.

### **Important Books**

- Kautilya's Arthashastra, Translated by R. Shamasastri
- Kautilya's Arthashastra, Translated by L.N. Rangarajan
- The Mahabharata, Translated by C. Rajagopalachari
- Manu Smriti (Laws of Manu), Translated by Wendy Doniger

- Chakraborty, S.K. (1995). Ethics in Management: Vedantic Perspectives
- Basu, S.K. (2012). Financial System and Financial Services in India
- Sihag, B.S. (2014). Kautilya: The True Founder of Economics
- Sternbach, L. (1963). Kautilya's Concepts in Economics

### **Important Readings**

- Sihag, B.S. (2007). "Kautilya on Public Goods and Taxation," History of Political Economy, 39(4): 763-788
- Trautmann, T.R. (2012). "Arthashastra: The Science of Wealth," History of Economic Ideas, 20(1): 115-138
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- Drekmeier, C. (1962). "Kingship and Community in Early India," Stanford University Press
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- Basham, A.L. (1954). "The Wonder That Was India: Economic Life and Organization," Grove Press
- Legal and Regulatory References (India)
- Companies Act, 2013 – Section 166 (Duties of Directors): Mandates directors to act in good faith in the best interests of the company, its employees, shareholders, community, and environment, aligning with Dharmic stakeholder governance.
- Companies Act, 2013 – Section 135 (Corporate Social Responsibility): Requires eligible companies to allocate at least 2% of average net profits toward CSR activities, institutionalizing Yajna-Arthaneeti and Dana principles.
- SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015: Mandates enhanced disclosures, transparency, and accountability, resonating with Satya and Kosh accountability principles of Arthashastra.
- SEBI Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR), 2021: Requires top listed companies to disclose ESG and stakeholder impact metrics, reflecting Dharmic emphasis on holistic welfare.
- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) – Guidelines on Fair Practices Code for Lenders: Emphasizes ethical lending, transparency, borrower protection, and grievance redressal, consistent with Rinn-Dharma.
- RBI Master Directions on Cooperative Banks and NBFCs: Support relationship-based banking, financial inclusion, and community finance models akin to Shreni systems.

- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016: Provides structured debt resolution, balancing creditor rights with debtor protection, reflecting Rinn-mukti and compassionate debt ethics.
- National Voluntary Guidelines (NVGs) on Social, Environmental and Economic Responsibilities of Business, MCA: Encourage responsible business conduct rooted in ethics, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement.

### **Brief Profile of Authors**

**Dr. Pritha Chaturvedi** is Associate Professor at ICFAI University Jharkhand, specializing in organizational behavior and Indian Knowledge Systems. She holds a Ph.D. in Management Studies with focus on indigenous management philosophies and their contemporary applications. Dr. Chaturvedi has published extensively in national and international journals on topics including ethical leadership, sustainable business practices, and the integration of traditional wisdom in modern management education. She also coordinates the NEP and NAAC initiatives of the University, focusing on outcome-based education, interdisciplinary learning, and quality assurance. Her research has been published in reputed journals such as SAGE, Taylor & Francis, and other UGC-approved outlets, and she is part of the Reviewer Panel for several international journals. A recipient of the Best Teacher Award (2022), Dr. Chaturvedi continues to bridge ancient Indian wisdom with contemporary management and financial practices.

Mob. +91-9204658264, E-mail: [prithachaturvedi@iujharkhand.edu.in](mailto:prithachaturvedi@iujharkhand.edu.in)

**Prof. Sumit Kumar Sinha** is Assistant Professor at ICFAI University Jharkhand with expertise in Accounting, Finance and corporate governance. Prof. Sinha has contributed to several academic publications and consultancy projects. He has conducted executive education programs for corporate leaders on Management and serves the role of PR Head to the university lesioning with organizations seeking to integrate traditional values with contemporary business practices.

Mob. +91-9471765040 E-mail: [sumitsinha@iujharkhand.edu.in](mailto:sumitsinha@iujharkhand.edu.in)

## 9.

# Reinterpreting Child Rights Jurisprudence through Pañcāᅅga Hermeneutics: An Indian Knowledge Systems

**Mr. Rudraksh Singh Sisodia**

*Student, B.A.LL.B.(Hons.), 3<sup>rd</sup> Year*

*Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL), Punjab*

**Ms. Bhavya Rai**

*Student, B.A.LL.B.(Hons.), 1<sup>st</sup> Year*

*Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL), Punjab*

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### **Abstract**

*In contemporary legal discourse, the interpretation of child rights remains deeply influenced by Western legal traditions and international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer a rich, indigenous epistemology capable of reorienting our understanding of legal obligations and protections concerning children. This chapter applies the Pañcāᅅga method—comprising Upakrama (beginning), Upasamhāra (conclusion), Abhyāsa (repetition), Apūrvatā (novelty), and Phala (result)—as an interpretive lens to critically assess Indian child rights jurisprudence, particularly under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the POCSO Act, and Article 39(e)-(f) of the Constitution.*

*Drawing from classical Indian legal thought rooted in Mimamsa and Dharmashastra traditions, the study contends that Pañcāᅅga hermeneutics not only provides a coherent and culturally embedded mode of interpretation but also highlights the teleological and ethical dimensions often absent in positivist readings of child law. Through case law analysis, statutory examination, and philosophical inquiry, the chapter identifies where legal narratives fail to capture the holistic wellbeing (śreyas) of children, particularly those in conflict with or in need of care and protection.*

*This interdisciplinary exploration—situated at the intersection of Law and Child Rights, Sociology, and IKS philosophy—also reflects on how integrating Pañcāᅅga principles can support more inclusive judicial reasoning, particularly in matters involving juvenile reform, rehabilitation, and psychosocial development. The chapter ultimately advocates for a syncretic model of legal interpretation, where indigenous methods like Pañcāᅅga complement statutory and constitutional mandates, thereby nurturing a jurisprudence that is both context-sensitive and future-oriented.*

**Key Words:** *Mimnansa, Restorative Justice, Child Rights, Vedic Interpretation, Synergistic Legal Reasoning.*

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Contextualizing child rights in India

Child rights in India operate within a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and legal frameworks. The diversity of the country—spanning multiple languages, religions, castes, and traditions—creates a nuanced environment for interpreting and implementing child rights. While India's commitment to international conventions like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>1</sup> is evident, the actual realization of these rights requires a deep understanding of the local context. This essay explores the layers that shape child rights in India, examines the challenges posed by economic and social factors, and underscores the need for contextualizing global standards within indigenous realities to achieve meaningful protection and promotion of child rights.

India's recognition of child rights has been embedded in its constitutional framework since independence. The Constitution of India reflects a commitment to protect children, recognizing their vulnerability and emphasizing their welfare through various provisions. Article 24 prohibits child labor in hazardous industries, while Article 21 guarantees the fundamental right to life and personal liberty, implicitly ensuring the protection of a child's right to survival and development. The Directive Principles of State Policy mandate the state to provide adequate nutrition, education, and opportunities for the holistic development of children.<sup>2</sup> Historically, the Indian freedom struggle also played a pivotal role in highlighting the importance of nurturing children as the future of the nation. Early social reformers and leaders emphasized education, health, and child protection, laying the groundwork for the contemporary child rights framework. Post-independence, India witnessed legislative measures aimed at addressing child welfare, but persistent socio-economic challenges complicated the full realization of these rights.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1.1.1 International Commitments and Indian Realities

India ratified the UNCRC in 1992, signaling its intention to align with global child rights standards. The UNCRC outlines a comprehensive set of rights covering survival, development, protection, and participation. These include the right to education, protection from exploitation, access to healthcare, and the right to be heard.<sup>4</sup> Despite this commitment, implementing these norms within India's vast and diverse population requires balancing universal principles with socio-cultural specificities.

The implementation gap is a notable issue. While India has enacted progressive laws—such as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and the Right of

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<sup>1</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

<sup>2</sup> Constitution of India, arts 15(3), 21, 21A, 39(e)–(f), 45.

<sup>3</sup> M N Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Orient BlackSwan 1966).

<sup>4</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act—the reality on the ground often falls short.<sup>5</sup> Structural problems like poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate infrastructure prevent uniform enforcement. Moreover, the diversity in social customs and economic conditions demands localized adaptations to international standards.

### **1.1.2 Socio-Economic Challenges Impacting Child Rights**

India's demographic and economic realities present significant obstacles to child rights. With over 40% of its population under the age of 18, ensuring the well-being of children is both a challenge and a priority. Widespread poverty undermines children's access to essential services such as nutrition, education, and healthcare. Malnutrition remains a major concern, impacting cognitive development and overall health, thereby limiting children's future potential.<sup>6</sup>

Child labor persists as a serious violation of child rights. Economic hardships compel many families to depend on the income generated by their children, despite laws prohibiting employment of children in hazardous conditions.<sup>7</sup> The informal economy, especially in rural and urban slum areas, thrives on cheap child labor, often escaping regulatory oversight. This practice denies children their right to education and exposes them to exploitation and abuse.

Child marriage, especially of girls, is another deeply entrenched issue affecting child rights in India. Despite legal prohibitions, socio-cultural norms and economic considerations sustain early marriages in many parts of the country<sup>8</sup>. Early marriage curtails educational opportunities and jeopardizes health due to early pregnancies, violating children's rights to development and protection.

### **1.1.3. Cultural Context and Its Influence on Child Rights**

Understanding child rights in India necessitates appreciation of its diverse cultural contexts. The idea of childhood itself varies across communities. In some tribal and rural areas, children take on responsibilities at a very early age, contributing to household work or family enterprises<sup>9</sup>. Such roles are often seen as a natural part of upbringing rather than exploitation, making universal child rights frameworks appear alien or intrusive.

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<sup>5</sup> Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 (India); Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (India); Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (India).

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2024: For Every Child, Health and Hope* (UNICEF 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 (India); N K Das, 'Child Labour in India: Socio-Economic Determinants' (2012) 47(1) *Economic and Political Weekly* 32.

<sup>8</sup> Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 (India).

<sup>9</sup> S B Kadam, 'Customary Laws and Constitutionalism: Tribal Laws in India' (2018) 9 *Journal of Indian Law and Society* 67.

Moreover, caste and gender hierarchies deeply influence children's experiences. Children from marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes often face systemic discrimination, leading to limited access to education and healthcare<sup>10</sup>. Gender bias manifests in lower investment in girls' education and health, reinforcing inequality from an early age.

The interplay of traditional practices and modern legal provisions sometimes leads to conflict or slow acceptance of child rights. For example, while the law prohibits child labor and marriage, traditional norms may resist change, viewing these practices as essential for survival or cultural continuity.<sup>11</sup>

## **1.2. The dominance of Western interpretive frameworks**

In the field of Indian child rights jurisprudence, the interpretive and conceptual tools most commonly employed by lawmakers, courts, and policy framers are overwhelmingly derived from Western legal traditions. These frameworks are rooted in ideologies such as liberal individualism, human rights universalism, and Enlightenment-based rationalism. While these paradigms have undoubtedly contributed to global advancements in child welfare and protection, their uncritical and dominant application in the Indian legal context raises a number of concerns. The wholesale adoption of Western interpretive structures often leads to a disconnect between legal norms and the lived realities of children in India.<sup>12</sup> This essay critically examines how this dominance creates interpretive gaps, marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems, and ultimately undermines the cultural relevance and effectiveness of child rights protections in the Indian context.

### **1.2.1 Liberal Individualism and Its Limitations in the Indian Context**

One of the defining features of Western legal philosophy is its emphasis on the autonomous individual as the fundamental unit of legal protection. In the context of child rights, this manifests as a focus on the child as an independent rights-holder, distinct from family or community structures. While such a perspective has value—particularly in countering exploitative or abusive familial practices—it tends to overlook the deep-rooted communal and relational nature of Indian society. In many Indian communities, the identity of the child is inseparable from that of the family, caste, religion, or village collective.<sup>13</sup> Legal frameworks that prioritize individual autonomy may, therefore, fail to capture the nuances of child welfare as understood in local cultural paradigms.

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<sup>10</sup> Usha Ramanathan, 'Child Rights and the Law: Intersections and Dissonances' (2013) 8 *Indian Journal of Human Rights Law Review* 45.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Small Change: Implementation Gaps in India's Child Protection Laws* (HRW 2023).

<sup>12</sup> B H MacCormick, *Legal Reasoning and Legal Theory* (Clarendon Press 1978); Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Harvard University Press 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press 1999).

For instance, the concept of a “best interest of the child,” a cornerstone in Western child rights law, is often interpreted in India through the lens of Western developmental psychology and liberal philosophy. Judicial interpretations tend to rely on normative assumptions that do not always reflect indigenous conceptions of childhood, responsibility, or maturity. Such an approach can inadvertently lead to interventions that, while legally sound, may disrupt social fabrics and traditional support systems that actually work in the child's favor.<sup>14</sup>

### **1.2.2 Universalism and Cultural Blindness**

The principle of universalism, which underpins most international human rights treaties including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), asserts that rights are inherent and apply uniformly regardless of geography, culture, or socio-economic context. India, as a signatory to the UNCRC, has incorporated many of its provisions into domestic law. However, the implementation and interpretation of these rights are often carried out without sufficient contextualization.<sup>15</sup> Universalist assumptions ignore the cultural specificity and diverse moral landscapes that shape how rights are understood and claimed in different regions of India.

For example, the legal minimum age for marriage, a key issue in child rights jurisprudence, is set according to international norms and Western models of maturity and consent. While child marriage is undoubtedly a serious issue, legal prohibitions often fail to consider the socio-economic pressures, gender dynamics, and traditional practices that influence early marriages in certain communities.<sup>16</sup> When courts apply international standards without accommodating these local variables, they may issue judgments that are legally correct but socially ineffective or even counterproductive.

### **1.2.3 The Marginalization of Indigenous Perspectives**

The predominance of Western frameworks has led to a systematic marginalization of indigenous legal traditions and child-rearing philosophies. India has a rich and diverse history of customary laws, community norms, and religious doctrines that regulate family and child-related matters. These indigenous systems, though not always formally codified, have long provided mechanisms for social protection, conflict resolution, and intergenerational care. However, in the current legal discourse, these traditions are often seen as regressive or incompatible with modern rights-based approaches, without a fair or thorough evaluation of their potential contributions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (University of California Press 2007).

<sup>15</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

<sup>16</sup> Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 (India).

<sup>17</sup> S B Kadam, ‘Customary Laws and Constitutionalism: Tribal Laws in India’ (2018) 9 *Journal of Indian Law and Society* 67.

This erasure is particularly evident in the treatment of tribal and rural communities. Customary practices among Adivasi and other indigenous groups often involve collective child-rearing models that differ significantly from the nuclear family structures assumed by Western jurisprudence. Legal interventions based on Western norms may disrupt these traditional models, stripping children of communal support systems that have ensured their safety and development for generations.<sup>18</sup> By sidelining these perspectives, the legal system imposes a homogenized view of child welfare that does not resonate with or reflect India's pluralistic realities.

### **1.3. Need for indigenous epistemologies in legal interpretation**

Legal interpretation plays a vital role in shaping the meaning and application of laws within any society. In a culturally diverse and pluralistic country like India, with its numerous indigenous communities and traditions, the dominant legal interpretive methods—largely shaped by Western jurisprudence—often fail to capture the full complexity of indigenous worldviews and lived realities.<sup>19</sup> This gap becomes especially problematic in sensitive areas such as child rights, where cultural values and community practices are integral to understanding and protecting children's welfare. There is an urgent need to incorporate indigenous epistemologies into legal interpretation to bridge this divide. Indian indigenous knowledge systems, deeply rooted in philosophical, cultural, and social traditions, offer alternative frameworks that prioritize relationality, community duty, and contextual wisdom<sup>20</sup>. Integrating these epistemologies into legal interpretation enriches jurisprudence, enhances the legitimacy of laws, and makes child rights protections more culturally appropriate and effective.<sup>21</sup>

#### **1.3.1 Indigenous Epistemologies: Foundations and Features**

Indigenous epistemologies represent knowledge systems developed through centuries of lived experience, cultural transmission, and collective memory<sup>22</sup>. In India, these systems are diverse and vary from one community to another but share common themes: interconnectedness, respect for nature, communal responsibility, and moral duty. Unlike Western epistemologies that often emphasize individual autonomy, abstract principles, and formal legal codes, indigenous knowledge systems are holistic, context-specific, and relational.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> M N Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Orient BlackSwan 1966).

<sup>19</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Harvard University Press 1986); B H MacCormick, *Legal Reasoning and Legal Theory* (Clarendon Press 1978).

<sup>20</sup> K T Pandurangi, *Purva-Mimamsa from an Interdisciplinary Point of View* (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Avadesh K Singh (eds), *Indian Knowledge Systems and Contemporary Policy* (Vivekananda International Foundation 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford University Press 1999).

<sup>23</sup> B K Matilal, *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Oxford

For example, many tribal communities in India, such as the Gond, Bhil, and Santhal, view the individual child as inseparable from family, clan, and the natural environment.<sup>24</sup> Their understanding of rights and responsibilities is embedded in the social fabric and spiritual cosmology. The concept of dharma or duty underscores a moral framework where rights are balanced with responsibilities toward the community and future generations.<sup>25</sup> This contrasts with Western liberal individualism but complements it by fostering a more sustainable, community-centered notion of justice.

### 1.3.2 Limitations of Western Legal Interpretation in India

Postcolonial Indian legal systems inherited frameworks heavily influenced by British common law and Western legal thought<sup>26</sup>. These systems prioritize textual interpretation, legal positivism, and universal human rights principles, often derived from international conventions.<sup>27</sup> While such frameworks have advanced the cause of child protection globally, their direct transplantation into India sometimes results in dissonance and limited effectiveness.

Western legal interpretation tends to focus on the individual child as a rights-holder distinct from familial or community contexts.<sup>28</sup> This can overlook the reality that, in many indigenous Indian communities, children's identities and well-being are deeply tied to collective traditions and social roles. For example, formal legal mandates around education or child labor may conflict with traditional roles where children contribute economically or socially in ways valued by their communities.<sup>29</sup> The failure to recognize these contextual differences risks alienating indigenous populations and undermining the enforcement of child rights.

Moreover, Indian courts often prioritize written law and formal evidence, sidelining oral traditions, customary laws, and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms that are central to many indigenous knowledge systems.<sup>30</sup> This exclusion can marginalize indigenous voices in legal processes, reduce access to justice, and decrease the cultural legitimacy of child rights protections

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University Press 1990).

<sup>24</sup> S B Kadam, 'Customary Laws and Constitutionalism: Tribal Laws in India' (2018) 9 *Journal of Indian Law and Society* 67.

<sup>25</sup> Jaimini, *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, trans Ganganatha Jha (Asiatic Society 1916); Kumāri Bhaṭṭa, *Tantravārttika*, trans Ganganatha Jha (Panini Office 1903).

<sup>26</sup> Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (University of California Press 2007).

<sup>27</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

<sup>28</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 (India); Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (India).

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Small Change: Implementation Gaps in India's Child Protection Laws* (HRW 2023).

### 1.3.3 Complementarity of Indigenous Epistemologies and Child Rights

Indigenous epistemologies offer rich perspectives that complement and deepen the understanding of child rights in India.<sup>31</sup> Their emphasis on relationality, community responsibility, and contextual wisdom enriches legal interpretation in several ways:

#### a) Relationality and Communal Rights

Indigenous worldviews conceptualize children not merely as individuals but as integral parts of relational networks involving family, clan, and environment. Recognizing this in legal interpretation shifts the focus from isolated individual rights to rights that emerge within social and ecological relationships.<sup>32</sup> This approach acknowledges that protecting a child's rights also means safeguarding their cultural identity, community participation, and connection to the land.

#### b) Moral Duty and Accountability

Indigenous epistemologies stress dharma, where rights imply reciprocal duties and responsibilities. This perspective encourages legal interpretations that consider the roles of parents, communities, and states as moral agents responsible for nurturing and protecting children<sup>33</sup>. It fosters accountability grounded in ethical and cultural norms alongside legal obligations.

#### c) Contextual Wisdom and Customary Law

Indigenous knowledge systems value the contextual and dynamic nature of laws, often transmitted orally through generations. Customary laws related to child welfare, dispute resolution, and social integration are tailored to the needs and values of specific communities. Recognizing these practices in formal legal systems promotes pluralistic jurisprudence, making child rights protection more responsive and culturally sensitive.<sup>34</sup>

#### d) Holistic Well-being

Indigenous epistemologies conceive child welfare holistically, integrating physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Legal interpretation informed by such epistemologies moves beyond narrow legal protections to encompass broader aspects of children's well-being, including cultural continuity and identity formation.<sup>35</sup>

## Chapter - 2 - Indian Knowledge Systems and the Concept of Pañcāṅga

### 2.1. Origins in Mimamsa philosophy

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<sup>31</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Avadesh K Singh (eds), *Indian Knowledge Systems and Contemporary Policy* (Vivekananda International Foundation 2022).

<sup>32</sup> S R Rao, *Pañcāṅga: A Traditional Hindu Calendar System* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 1999).

<sup>33</sup> J B Chethimattam, *Hermeneutics and Language in Purva Mimamsa* (Madras University Press 1971).

<sup>34</sup> S B Kadam, 'Customary Laws and Constitutionalism: Tribal Laws in India' (2018) 9 *Journal of Indian Law and Society* 67.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2024: For Every Child, Health and Hope* (UNICEF 2024).

The Pañcāṅga, the traditional Hindu calendar system, has played an indispensable role in the religious and social life of India for millennia. Its intricate construction and usage reflect a profound synthesis of religious, philosophical, and astronomical knowledge. Central to understanding the origins of Pañcāṅga is recognizing its deep roots in the Mimamsa school of Indian philosophy. Mimamsa, with its primary concern for Vedic interpretation and ritual correctness, provided the intellectual and methodological framework within which Pañcāṅga was conceived, developed, and preserved.<sup>36</sup>

### **Mimamsa Philosophy: The Pursuit of Dharma through Ritual**

Mimamsa, one of the six classical darshanas or philosophical schools of Indian thought, is essentially a hermeneutical tradition concerned with elucidating the meaning and correct practice of Vedic rituals. It derives its name from the Sanskrit root *mīmāṃsā*, meaning “reflection” or “critical investigation.” Unlike other Indian philosophies that focus more on metaphysics or epistemology, Mimamsa’s primary focus lies in karma—ritual action—as a means to uphold dharma and cosmic order.<sup>37</sup>

At the heart of Mimamsa is the conviction that the Vedas are *apaurusheya*, or authorless, eternal, and infallible texts that reveal eternal truths and prescribe precise ritual actions. This unshakable faith in the Vedas’ authority demands a meticulous and systematic approach to textual interpretation. Mimamsa scholars developed a complex and refined hermeneutic that sought to resolve ambiguities, harmonize conflicting injunctions, and maintain the integrity of ritual prescriptions.<sup>38</sup>

### **Hermeneutical Rigour and Interpretative Techniques**

The Mimamsa school pioneered an advanced system of interpretation to navigate the intricacies of Vedic texts. The Vedas, with their layered meanings and often terse injunctions, posed interpretative challenges that necessitated a methodology capable of delivering consistent and authoritative meanings.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Key interpretive tools included:**

- **Adhikarana-Samuchchaya (Topic Compilation):** Grouping and analyzing related passages to achieve coherent understanding.
- **Arthapatti (Presumption):** Logical inference to fill interpretative gaps.
- **Anvaya-Vyatireka (Positive-Negative Correlation):** Contextual reading to affirm or negate the applicability of instructions.

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<sup>36</sup> K V Sarma, *A History of Indian Astronomy* (Motilal Banarsidass 1985); S R Rao, *Pañcāṅga: A Traditional Hindu Calendar System* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan 1999).

<sup>37</sup> Jaimini, *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, trans Ganganatha Jha (Asiatic Society 1916).

<sup>38</sup> Śābara-Bhāṣya on the *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, ed K T Pandurangī (Karnataka Sanskrit University 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, *Tantravārttika*, trans Ganganatha Jha (Panini Office 1903).

- **Upapatti (Substantiation):** Establishing principles through rigorous argumentation.
- **Lingas (Indicatory Marks):** Recognizing linguistic markers that signal special instructions or conditions.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.2. Explanation of the five limbs

The Pañcāṅga method, rooted in classical interpretive traditions, is a structured approach that divides the process of understanding a text or issue into five distinct limbs. These five limbs—Upakrama, Upasamhāra, Abhyāsa, Apūrvatā, and Phala—each serve a vital role, collectively forming a comprehensive methodology.<sup>41</sup> Their sequential and interconnected nature ensures that interpretation is thorough, coherent, and meaningful, bridging intellectual inquiry with practical application.

### 1. Upakrama (Beginning)

Upakrama is the initiating limb, marking the starting point of interpretation. This stage is crucial because it lays the foundation for the entire process. It involves several fundamental components: setting the context, defining the purpose, and framing the interpretive inquiry.

Context-setting includes understanding the socio-cultural, historical, philosophical, or linguistic background of the text or issue at hand. This contextual awareness prevents anachronistic or superficial readings. For instance, interpreting an ancient philosophical treatise without recognizing the period's intellectual milieu would likely lead to misunderstandings or misrepresentations.

Defining the purpose is equally important. Upakrama demands clarity about why the interpretation is undertaken. Is the aim to resolve ambiguity, uncover deeper meanings, reconcile contradictions, or derive ethical teachings? Articulating these goals helps focus the interpreter's attention and prioritizes aspects of the text accordingly.

Framing the inquiry involves formulating preliminary questions or hypotheses. These questions serve as guides that orient the examination, preventing random or unfocused analysis.<sup>42</sup> For example, an interpreter might ask: What is the text's fundamental message? How does this concept relate to established doctrines? What implications does it have for contemporary thought?

By establishing a clear starting point, Upakrama organizes the interpretive endeavor, making subsequent steps systematic and coherent. It prevents wandering

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<sup>40</sup> J B Chethimattam, *Hermeneutics and Language in Purva Mimamsa* (Madras University Press 1971).

<sup>41</sup> Elisa Freschi, *Duty, Language and Reality: Studies on Mīmāṃsā and Its Interpretation of Scriptural Language* (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2012).

<sup>42</sup> B K Matilal, *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Oxford University Press 1990).

in the vast terrain of possibilities and anchors the analysis within a defined scope and intent.

## 2. Upasamhāra (Conclusion)

Upasamhāra is the limb of conclusion or summation. After the detailed examination and critical engagement with the text or problem, this stage synthesizes the insights acquired. Its role is to bring clarity and resolution to the interpretive challenge.

The process of conclusion is not a mere summary but an integrative activity. During interpretation, various aspects may come to light, some of which could appear contradictory or complex. Upasamhāra involves carefully weighing these diverse elements, resolving apparent conflicts, and forming a coherent understanding that addresses the initial questions posited in Upakrama.

This limb also entails critical evaluation. It examines the validity and consistency of interpretations developed throughout the process. Does the proposed meaning align with the text's overall context and purpose? Does it maintain logical coherence? Is it supported by sufficient evidence?

Furthermore, Upasamhāra situates the interpretation within a broader intellectual or ethical framework. It connects specific insights to larger philosophical or practical concerns, thereby enhancing the interpretation's relevance and depth.<sup>43</sup>

Ultimately, Upasamhāra provides closure to the interpretive journey, offering a well-rounded and substantiated conclusion that resolves ambiguities and illuminates the text's essential meaning.

## 3. Abhyāsa (Repetition)

Abhyāsa, the limb of repetition, underscores the importance of sustained engagement with core ideas or principles discovered during interpretation. It recognizes that understanding is often deepened through consistent reinforcement rather than single, isolated insights.

Repetition in this context is a disciplined reaffirmation rather than mere mechanical reiteration. By revisiting pivotal themes, concepts, or passages multiple times, Abhyāsa helps solidify their significance within the interpretive framework. This repeated engagement reduces the risk of misinterpretation caused by cursory readings or transient distractions.

Moreover, Abhyāsa functions as a mechanism for clarity. Complex or nuanced meanings frequently require persistent attention before they become fully comprehensible. Through reiteration, the interpreter can highlight essential points, ensuring they are not lost amid secondary or tangential details.

Consistency is another crucial aspect reinforced by Abhyāsa. By continually aligning emerging insights with previously established ideas, the interpreter

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<sup>43</sup> Jaimini, *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, trans Ganganatha Jha (Asiatic Society 1916).

maintains coherence throughout the analysis. This prevents fragmentation or contradiction, which could undermine the interpretive process's integrity.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Abhyāsa has pedagogical value. When interpretations are communicated or taught, repetition ensures that learners grasp and internalize the key concepts, thus perpetuating the interpretive tradition effectively. Therefore, Abhyāsa is a vital limb that transforms preliminary understanding into robust knowledge, anchoring interpretation firmly within a stable and coherent framework.

#### **4. Apūrvatā (Novelty)**

Apūrvatā is the limb that introduces innovation and originality into the interpretive process. While the method respects tradition and builds upon established knowledge, it simultaneously recognizes the necessity for new insights to keep interpretation dynamic and relevant.

This limb focuses on identifying what distinguishes the current interpretation from prior understandings. It emphasizes the discovery of fresh perspectives, novel meanings, or innovative applications that expand the horizon of comprehension.

Novelty can arise in several ways. One common approach is re-examining familiar texts in light of new contexts or questions. For example, a classical text might yield different meanings when interpreted through contemporary ethical concerns or scientific paradigms. This process enriches the interpretive tradition by demonstrating its adaptability.<sup>45</sup>

Another form of novelty is the uncovering of subtle or hidden meanings previously overlooked due to limitations of language, cultural bias, or intellectual constraints. Such insights often result from meticulous analysis and critical reflection.

Apūrvatā is essential because it prevents interpretive stagnation. By encouraging originality, it fosters intellectual growth and keeps the tradition vibrant. It also aligns interpretation with the evolving nature of human knowledge and experience. However, novelty is not pursued arbitrarily; it must be grounded in sound reasoning and supported by evidence. The challenge lies in balancing respect for tradition with the courage to propose fresh ideas that enhance rather than undermine existing understandings.

#### **5. Phala (Result/Outcome)**

Phala, the final limb, concerns itself with the practical implications and consequences of the interpretive process. It highlights the principle that interpretation should culminate in outcomes that influence knowledge, behavior, or decision-making.

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<sup>44</sup> Śābara-Bhāṣya on the *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, ed K T Pandurangi (Karnataka Samskrit University 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Agata Ciabattini, Anand Vasudevan and Ede Zimmermann, 'Mīmāṃsā Deontic Logic: Proof Theory and Applications' (2019) 28 *Journal of Applied Non-Classical Logics* 397.

This limb ensures that interpretation is not an abstract or purely intellectual exercise but is connected to tangible results. These results might be ethical guidelines, policy recommendations, philosophical insights, or new avenues for scholarly inquiry.

Phala also serves as a criterion for assessing the value of an interpretation. If the interpretive effort leads to clear, actionable insights or advances understanding in meaningful ways, it is deemed successful. Conversely, interpretations that lack practical relevance or fail to impact further knowledge or action may be considered incomplete.

The application-oriented nature of Phala emphasizes the interdependence of theory and practice. It reminds interpreters that meaning has consequences and that understanding must ultimately serve human purposes.

Moreover, Phala contributes to the ongoing cycle of inquiry. The outcomes of one interpretation often become the starting points for new questions and further exploration, linking back to Upakrama. This cyclical process ensures continuous growth and refinement of knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

By focusing on results, Phala reinforces the Pañcāṅga method's holistic nature—combining rigorous intellectual analysis with real-world significance.

### **2.3. Comparison with modern legal hermeneutics**

Legal hermeneutics, the theory and practice of interpreting legal texts, remains a cornerstone of judicial reasoning and legislative application. In contemporary legal systems, hermeneutics generally emphasizes textual analysis, legislative intent, and adherence to precedent, aiming to promote clarity, consistency, and predictability. Rooted in Western jurisprudential traditions, this approach focuses on a linear and often rigid understanding of law as a system of rules designed to govern behavior and resolve disputes.<sup>47</sup>

However, such an approach, while essential for maintaining rule of law, often proves inadequate in accommodating the complexities of diverse socio-cultural realities, especially within pluralistic societies such as India. The strict reliance on text and precedent may overlook the broader cultural, historical, and social contexts in which laws operate, leading to interpretations that are legally sound but socially disconnected.

In contrast, the Pañcāṅga—a classical framework from Indian philosophy and traditional knowledge systems—presents a cyclical, multidimensional, and contextually embedded model of interpretation. Originally a calendrical tool based on five interrelated elements (Tithi, Vara, Nakshatra, Yoga, and Karana),

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<sup>46</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford University Press 1999).

<sup>47</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Harvard University Press 1986); B H MacCormick, *Legal Reasoning and Legal Theory* (Clarendon Press 1978).

Pañcāṅga can be adapted metaphorically to legal hermeneutics, emphasizing balance, relationality, and temporal dynamism.<sup>48</sup>

This essay explores the differences and potential complementarities between modern legal hermeneutics and Pañcāṅga-inspired interpretive frameworks. It focuses on how integrating Pañcāṅga principles could enrich the interpretation of child rights jurisprudence in India, producing legal outcomes that are both principled and context-sensitive.

### Foundations of Modern Legal Hermeneutics

Modern legal hermeneutics, particularly in common law jurisdictions, centers on several core interpretive methodologies. The primary focus is on the text itself, regarded as the authoritative source of law. Interpretive tools such as:

- **Textualism**, which insists on the ordinary, plain meaning of statutory language,
- **Intentionalism**, which seeks to uncover the legislature's original intent,
- **Purposivism**, which looks to the broader goals and purposes behind the law,
- **Precedent (stare decisis)**, ensuring consistency through adherence to earlier judicial decisions,

collectively structure the interpretive enterprise. These approaches reflect a rationalist, objectivist philosophy of law, treating statutes and constitutions as stable, predictable instruments.

The emphasis on textual clarity and legislative will aims to reduce judicial arbitrariness and enhance the legitimacy of legal outcomes. However, this approach tends to prioritize legal certainty over interpretive flexibility, often downplaying the social, cultural, and historical factors that influence how laws are understood and applied in practice.<sup>49</sup>

In multicultural societies, this rigidity may lead to formalistic interpretations that fail to resonate with the lived experiences of diverse communities. For instance, child rights laws that are modeled strictly on international conventions and statutory language may not fully capture the socio-economic and cultural realities faced by children in rural or marginalized communities.<sup>50</sup>

### Pañcāṅga as an Interpretive Framework

This methodical approach ensured that ritual acts prescribed in the Vedas were understood not only literally but in ways that preserved their spiritual efficacy.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> K T Pandurangi, *Purva-Mimamsa from an Interdisciplinary Point of View* (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Paul Horwitz, 'The Crisis of Legal Interpretation' (2011) 44 *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 511.

<sup>50</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

<sup>51</sup> Selected passages from the *Ṛg Veda* and *Brāhmaṇas* relating to *kāla* and *ṛta* (see R T H Griffith tr, *The Rig Veda: English Translation* (Motilal Banarsidass 1973)).

The ritual, after all, was not simply mechanical but embedded with symbolic and cosmic significance.

### **1. Textual Meaning: Fixed vs. Fluid**

Modern legal hermeneutics views the legal text as possessing a relatively fixed meaning, discoverable through linguistic analysis and legislative history. This perspective often privileges the “original meaning” or a single best interpretation. Conversely, the Pañcāṅga framework treats meaning as inherently fluid and cyclical. Legal texts are living documents whose significance evolves with changing social contexts. In Indian child rights jurisprudence, this approach allows for interpretations that consider shifting notions of childhood, family, and community roles, ensuring the law’s continued relevance.

For example, the concept of “best interests of the child,” a cornerstone of child rights, may be interpreted differently when viewed through indigenous family structures versus formal Western nuclear family models<sup>52</sup>. Pañcāṅga’s fluidity accommodates these variations, encouraging interpretations that respect cultural diversity without sacrificing fundamental rights.

### **2. Context: Peripheral vs. Central**

In modern hermeneutics, context is often secondary—relevant primarily to clarifying ambiguous text or intent but not central to interpretation. The focus remains on legal texts and precedent.

By contrast, Pañcāṅga places context at the heart of interpretation. Historical, cultural, and social contexts are not ancillary but constitutive of meaning.<sup>53</sup> This approach is critical in India, where child rights issues intersect with customs, traditions, and socio-economic realities, such as caste, tribal practices, and rural livelihoods.

For example, addressing child labor laws requires understanding local economic pressures and community survival strategies. Pañcāṅga encourages interpreters to incorporate such contextual knowledge, fostering interpretations that are both legally sound and socially just.

### **3. Stability vs. Adaptability**

Legal hermeneutics prioritizes stability, relying on precedent and fixed meanings to preserve legal certainty. While flexibility exists, it is often cautiously exercised.<sup>54</sup>

Pañcāṅga’s cyclicity embraces both stability and change as complementary. It recognizes that law must preserve core values while adapting to new circumstances, especially in social domains like child rights, where evolving

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<sup>52</sup> Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (University of California Press 2007).

<sup>53</sup> M N Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Orient BlackSwan 1966).

<sup>54</sup> Agata Ciabattoni, Anand Vasudevan and Ede Zimmermann, ‘Mīmāṃsā Deontic Logic: Proof Theory and Applications’ (2019) 28 *Journal of Applied Non-Classical Logics* 397.

educational, health, and protection standards necessitate interpretive responsiveness. This balance prevents ossification of legal norms and supports progressive jurisprudence sensitive to India's rapid social transformations.

#### **4. Theory and Practice: Separation vs. Integration**

Modern hermeneutics often treats theoretical interpretation as distinct from practical implementation, sometimes resulting in judicial pronouncements disconnected from on-ground realities.

Pañcāṅga explicitly bridges theory and practice, insisting that interpretation must lead to effective outcomes. Child rights law, interpreted through this lens, becomes a tool not only for legal adjudication but for social change, aligning legal mandates with policy and community action.

#### **5. Scope: Narrow vs. Expansive**

Modern hermeneutics tends to operate within the confines of legal texts and established doctrine, occasionally venturing into moral reasoning but generally confined to legal boundaries.

Pañcāṅga's hermeneutics is expansive, integrating ethical, philosophical, and cultural dimensions. This broader scope enriches child rights jurisprudence by embedding it within a matrix of social justice, community ethics, and cultural values, promoting interpretations that resonate with India's diverse population.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Application to Child Rights Jurisprudence in India**

India's child rights framework is complex, involving international treaties like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), national legislation including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and deeply rooted social practices.<sup>56</sup>

Modern legal hermeneutics facilitates alignment with international standards, ensuring India meets global obligations. However, the practical application of these standards often encounters socio-cultural resistance or gaps, particularly in rural, tribal, or marginalized communities where traditional practices and economic realities shape child welfare.<sup>57</sup>

Integrating Pañcāṅga-inspired hermeneutics offers pathways to reconcile these tensions:

- It allows recognition of indigenous child-rearing practices without compromising fundamental rights.

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<sup>55</sup> B K Matilal and Jonardon Ganeri (eds), *The Character of Logic in India* (State University of New York Press 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (India); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

<sup>57</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Avadesh K Singh (eds), *Indian Knowledge Systems and Contemporary Policy* (Vivekananda International Foundation 2022).

- It provides a framework to interpret child labor prohibitions in ways sensitive to economic and social contexts.
- It supports nuanced interpretations of child protection that include community-based approaches.
- It encourages participatory jurisprudence involving families, local leaders, and children themselves, respecting cultural agency.<sup>58</sup>

For instance, courts dealing with early marriage cases can balance statutory prohibitions with community dialogue, fostering culturally appropriate yet rights-based solutions

## **Chapter – 3 - Application of Pañcāᅅga to Indian Child Rights Framework**

### **3.1. Overview of key laws**

India’s legal framework dedicated to child rights is a complex and multi-layered system, comprising statutory enactments and constitutional provisions. These laws collectively aim to safeguard children’s welfare, dignity, and development, ensuring their protection from exploitation, abuse, neglect, and discrimination. The framework also guarantees essential rights such as education, health, and rehabilitation.<sup>59</sup> This overview systematically examines the principal laws and constitutional mandates that govern child rights in India, focusing on their scope, objectives, and significance in establishing a protective environment for children.

### **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 is the cornerstone of India’s child protection legal regime. Enacted to replace the Juvenile Justice Act of 2000, it incorporates international principles such as those outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>60</sup>. The Act provides a comprehensive legal framework for both children in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection, making it unique in its dual approach.

#### **Scope of the Act**

##### **The Act covers two primary groups of children:**

- Juveniles in conflict with the law:** Children below 18 years who are alleged to have committed criminal offenses.
- Children in need of care and protection:** This includes children who are orphaned, abandoned, trafficked, victims of sexual abuse, or otherwise vulnerable.

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<sup>58</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2024: For Every Child, Health and Hope* (UNICEF 2024).

<sup>59</sup> Constitution of India arts 15(3), 21, 21A, 39(e)–(f), 45.

<sup>60</sup> Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 (India); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) 1577 UNTS 3.

## Key Provisions<sup>61</sup>

- **Child-Friendly Justice System:** Recognizing the vulnerability of children, the Act mandates the establishment of a child-friendly justice system. Procedures are designed to be non-intimidating and protective, ensuring the child's dignity is maintained throughout the legal process.
- **Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs):** These boards handle cases involving juveniles accused of crimes. They comprise experts with knowledge of child psychology and welfare, who decide on the best course of action, prioritizing rehabilitation.
- **Child Welfare Committees (CWCs):** CWCs are responsible for children in need of care and protection. They ensure these children receive necessary care, including placement in suitable foster care, adoption, or institutional care when required.
- **Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration:** The Act focuses on rehabilitation rather than punishment. It promotes alternatives such as foster care, sponsorship, adoption, and institutional care aimed at reintegrating children into society with dignity.
- **Trial of Juveniles Aged 16 to 18:** The Act permits the trial of juveniles between 16 and 18 years as adults if they are accused of heinous crimes, following a preliminary assessment of their mental and physical capacity to commit such an offense.
- **Prohibition of Corporal Punishment:** It explicitly prohibits any form of physical punishment or cruel treatment in institutions where children are placed.

This Act represents a paradigm shift in juvenile justice by embedding child welfare principles in the legal process, ensuring that children are protected as rights-holders rather than merely offenders or dependents.

## Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, was enacted in response to the alarming rise in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Prior to POCSO, existing laws addressing sexual offenses were inadequate in recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of children.<sup>62</sup>

### Objectives and Coverage

POCSO addresses all forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, sexual harassment, and the use of children for pornographic purposes. It applies to all individuals below the age of 18, regardless of gender or social status.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Model Rules under the Juvenile Justice Act 2016* (Government of India 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (India).

<sup>63</sup> UNICEF, *Child Protection Legislation in India: A Review of POCSO Implementation* (UNICEF 2021).

## Important Features

- **Special Courts:** The Act mandates the creation of Special Courts to conduct speedy trials of sexual offenses involving children. This expedites the justice process and minimizes the duration of trauma for victims.
- **Child-Friendly Procedures:** The law ensures the child's experience during investigation and trial is as non-traumatic as possible. Statements are recorded in a child-sensitive manner, repeated questioning is avoided, and the presence of a trusted adult is ensured.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** POCSO imposes a duty on every person, including professionals and the general public, to report any instance of sexual abuse or suspicion thereof. Non-reporting can lead to penalties.
- **Burden of Proof and Presumption of Guilt:** The Act shifts the burden of proof to the accused, presuming guilt unless proven otherwise, which significantly strengthens protection for the child.
- **Confidentiality and Identity Protection:** The identity of the child victim is strictly protected to prevent stigmatization and further harm.

POCSO is considered one of the most progressive legislations globally in the context of child sexual abuse laws, as it combines stringent penalties with procedural safeguards, ensuring that children receive justice while being shielded from secondary victimization.<sup>64</sup>

## Constitutional Provisions Supporting Child Rights

The Indian Constitution provides a strong foundation for child rights through several specific articles that recognize children as a vulnerable group requiring special attention. These constitutional provisions set the legal and moral framework for child protection laws.

### Article 15(3): Special Provisions for Children

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on various grounds such as religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. However, Article 15(3) explicitly allows the state to make special provisions for women and children. This empowers the government to enact laws and formulate policies aimed at addressing children's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

### Article 21A: Right to Education

Introduced by the 86th Amendment in 2002, Article 21A guarantees the right to free and compulsory education to all children aged six to fourteen years. This provision is foundational in ensuring children's access to education, which is pivotal for their overall development and empowerment.

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<sup>64</sup> National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, *POCSO e-Box Annual Report 2023* (NCPCR 2023).

## **Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 39(e) and 39(f))**

While Directive Principles are non-justiciable, they guide the state's policy direction. Article 39(e) mandates the state to ensure that children are not abused and that their childhood and youth are protected from exploitation and moral neglect. Article 39(f) calls for providing children with opportunities for healthy development.

## **Article 45: Early Childhood Care and Education**

Article 45 directs the state to endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete six years of age. This highlights the importance of nurturing children during their formative years to ensure physical and cognitive development. These constitutional provisions collectively establish a legal and ethical framework, mandating the state's proactive role in protecting and promoting child rights.<sup>65</sup>

## **Complementary Laws and Policies**

In addition to the Juvenile Justice Act, POCSO, and constitutional mandates, several other laws and policies support child rights protection in India:

- **The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986:** This law prohibits the employment of children below the age of fourteen in hazardous occupations and regulates work conditions for children above that age. It seeks to eliminate child labor, a major barrier to education and development.
- **The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act):** Operationalizing Article 21A, this Act guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years. It also sets standards for school infrastructure, teacher qualifications, and student assessment to improve educational quality.
- **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006:** This legislation criminalizes child marriage, which undermines children's health, education, and rights, particularly of girls. It establishes the legal marriageable age and empowers courts to annul child marriages.
- **The Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005:** This Act establishes the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and State Commissions to monitor and enforce child rights across the country.<sup>66</sup>
- **The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2019:** These rules provide detailed procedural guidelines for the effective implementation of POCSO, focusing on victim support and witness protection.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Constitution of India arts 15(3), 21A, 39(e)–(f), 45; 86th Amendment Act 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 (India); Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (India); Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006 (India); Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act 2005 (India).

<sup>67</sup> Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules 2019 (India).

Together, these laws and policies complement the core statutory framework, addressing various dimensions of child protection and welfare.

### **3.2. Case analysis (e.g., Sheela Barse, Salil Bali, Shilpa Mittal)**

The judicial system in India has played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of child rights, interpreting constitutional mandates, and ensuring the implementation of laws that protect children from various forms of abuse and neglect. Through several landmark judgments, Indian courts have highlighted the state's responsibilities and the urgent need to uphold the dignity, safety, and welfare of children. This case analysis explores three significant judicial pronouncements—*Sheela Barse v. Union of India* (1986), *Salil Bali v. Union of India* (2012), and *Shilpa Mittal v. Union of India* (2013)—that have critically influenced the interpretation and enforcement of child rights in India.

#### **Sheela Barse v. Union of India (1986): An In-Depth Analysis**

##### **Background and Context**

The *Sheela Barse v. Union of India*<sup>68</sup> case is widely regarded as a landmark judgment in the domain of child rights jurisprudence in India. Initiated as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the case was filed by Sheela Barse, a prominent human rights activist and journalist, who exposed the gross maltreatment and inhumane conditions faced by children detained in custodial institutions. During the mid-1980s, institutional care for children, including juvenile homes, remand homes, and observation homes, were characterized by overcrowding, neglect, physical and mental abuse, and a total disregard for the dignity of children. The state's failure to provide safe and rehabilitative environments triggered judicial intervention.

##### **Legal Issues Raised**

The core issue raised before the Supreme Court concerned the state's constitutional and statutory obligations toward children in its custody. The petitioner challenged the violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14 (Right to Equality), 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), and 39(e) and (f) of the Directive Principles of State Policy, which mandate the protection and well-being of children. The petitioners argued that children in institutional custody were subjected to degrading treatment, denied access to education, healthcare, and adequate nutrition, and that the conditions were tantamount to punitive incarceration rather than rehabilitation.

##### **Judicial Reasoning and Observations**

The Supreme Court's judgment recognized the vulnerability of children in custody and underscored the principle that custody should serve rehabilitative and protective functions rather than punitive ones. The Court held that every child,

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<sup>68</sup> *Sheela Barse v Union of India* (1986) 3 SCC 596 (SC).

irrespective of their custodial status, is entitled to dignity, protection, and humane treatment as a matter of constitutional mandate.

Significantly, the Court drew attention to the state's dual responsibility: first, to ensure the physical safety and emotional well-being of children in institutional care; and second, to facilitate their social reintegration through education and skill development. It criticized the lack of infrastructure, inadequate staffing, absence of medical facilities, and the failure to provide vocational training.

The judgment also highlighted the absence of oversight mechanisms, calling for periodic inspections, monitoring bodies, and accountability from custodial authorities. It acknowledged the need for specialized personnel trained in child psychology and social work to handle the unique challenges posed by children in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection.

### **Impact and Significance**

The Sheela Barse case served as a catalyst for reform in the juvenile justice system and child care institutions. Following the judgment, several measures were initiated at both central and state levels to improve conditions in custodial homes. This included the drafting and enactment of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, which incorporated many of the principles articulated by the Court.

The case marked a shift from a welfare model that often treated children as delinquents to a rights-based model that emphasized their entitlement to care, protection, and rehabilitation. The judgment reinforced the importance of viewing children not merely as subjects of state control but as individuals with inherent rights demanding protection.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, the case influenced the development of child-friendly judicial procedures and the recognition of children's participation rights in legal processes affecting them. It also encouraged the formation of Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards aimed at safeguarding children's interests within the justice system.

### **Limitations and Critique**

While the judgment was progressive, critics argue that its implementation has faced significant challenges. Persistent overcrowding, inadequate funding, and insufficient trained personnel continue to plague child care institutions in many parts of the country. The systemic neglect identified in the 1980s has not been entirely eradicated, indicating the gap between judicial pronouncements and ground realities.

Moreover, the judgment, grounded largely in constitutional guarantees and legal mandates, did not extensively engage with the socio-cultural contexts affecting

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<sup>69</sup> S K Panda, 'Reforming Juvenile Justice in India: An Analysis of the Sheela Barse Judgment' (2018) 10 *Indian Journal of Law and Society* 45.

children in custody, such as poverty, caste discrimination, and gender biases. The reliance on formal legal frameworks sometimes limits the scope for culturally sensitive rehabilitative measures that could be more effective in certain communities.

## **Salil Bali v. Union of India (2012): A Comprehensive Examination**

### **Background and Context**

Salil Bali v. Union of India (2012)<sup>70</sup> emerged against the backdrop of ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of child rights policies, particularly those related to education and protection from exploitation. India's demographic profile, with a substantial population of children, presents unique challenges in ensuring access to quality education and safeguarding against child labor, trafficking, and abuse.

The case was brought as a public interest litigation to highlight the government's failure to implement various laws and policies that guarantee the right to free and compulsory education and protect children from exploitation. It drew attention to the systemic failures in delivering these fundamental rights, despite progressive legislation like the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act).

### **Legal Issues Raised**

The primary legal issue before the Supreme Court was the effective enforcement of child rights enshrined in the Constitution and supported by statutory laws. The petitioners argued that despite clear mandates, children continued to be deprived of educational opportunities, and many remained vulnerable to hazardous labor and trafficking.

The case challenged the inadequacies in government policies, including poor infrastructure in schools, teacher absenteeism, discriminatory practices against marginalized children, and the lack of effective monitoring mechanisms to prevent exploitation.

### **Judicial Reasoning and Observations**

The Supreme Court acknowledged the transformative potential of the RTE Act and other child protection laws but emphasized that legislative enactments alone do not guarantee rights. It stressed the need for sincere implementation, adequate budgetary allocations, and administrative accountability.

The Court observed that education is a fundamental right under Article 21A of the Constitution and that the state must ensure access not only to formal schooling but also to a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment. The Court called for strict enforcement of prohibitions on child labor and exploitation, noting that economic pressures often force children into hazardous work, undermining their right to education and development.

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<sup>70</sup> *Salil Bali v Union of India* (2013) 7 SCC 705 (SC).

The judgment highlighted the interconnectedness of child rights, pointing out that denial of education often correlates with increased vulnerability to abuse and trafficking. It urged the creation of child protection mechanisms involving coordination among educational authorities, labor departments, and social welfare agencies.

### **Impact and Significance**

The Salil Bali case reinforced the judiciary's proactive role in overseeing the implementation of child rights policies.<sup>71</sup> By emphasizing the practical aspects of enforcement, the Court moved beyond mere declaratory pronouncements to hold the state accountable for tangible outcomes.

The case prompted governments to prioritize the improvement of school infrastructure, teacher training, and the removal of barriers to enrollment, especially for children from marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and economically disadvantaged groups.

It also reinforced the legal framework for child protection, advocating for rigorous action against trafficking and exploitation networks. The judgment underscored the importance of interdepartmental coordination to create a protective ecosystem around children.<sup>72</sup>

### **Limitations and Critique**

Despite the judgment's clarity, challenges in policy implementation persist, especially in rural and economically backward areas. Structural issues such as poverty, social discrimination, and inadequate governance often hinder the realization of child rights in practice.

The judgment, while comprehensive in its legal reasoning, could benefit from a deeper engagement with grassroots realities and cultural factors that influence children's access to education and protection. The enforcement of policies requires a culturally sensitive approach that takes into account local customs, languages, and community structures.

Moreover, the Court's focus on state responsibility sometimes overlooks the role of civil society organizations and community participation in promoting child rights. A more holistic approach incorporating these actors could enhance policy effectiveness.

## **Shilpa Mittal v. Union of India (2013): A Detailed Case Study**

### **Background and Context**

*Shilpa Mittal v. Union of India* (2013)<sup>73</sup> is a landmark case that deals with the protection of children from sexual offenses, a grave violation of child rights and

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<sup>71</sup> Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (India).

<sup>72</sup> UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 2023: For Every Child, Inclusion* (UNICEF 2023).

<sup>73</sup> *Shilpa Mittal v Union of India* (2020) 2 SCC 787 (SC).

dignity. The case was brought in the context of increasing awareness of child sexual abuse and the need for stronger legal frameworks and procedures to address such crimes sensitively and effectively.

The case was heard soon after the enactment of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012, which introduced comprehensive provisions to protect children from sexual crimes and establish child-friendly judicial processes.

### **Legal Issues Raised**

The primary legal issue before the Supreme Court was ensuring the effective implementation of POCSO, with a particular focus on the procedures related to reporting, investigation, trial, and victim rehabilitation. The petitioners highlighted deficiencies in the way law enforcement agencies and courts handled cases involving child sexual abuse, often leading to secondary victimization and trauma.

The case sought judicial directives to make the criminal justice system more sensitive to the needs of child victims and to hold the state accountable for providing timely and adequate support services.

### **Judicial Reasoning and Observations**

The Supreme Court recognized the unique vulnerability of child victims of sexual offenses and the necessity of a specialized approach in handling such cases. The Court emphasized that POCSO's provisions must be implemented in letter and spirit to ensure justice without delay or trauma.

The Court mandated the establishment of child-friendly infrastructure in police stations and courts, including the presence of trained personnel and the use of video recording to avoid repeated questioning. It emphasized that the child's privacy and dignity must be preserved at all stages of the process.

The judgment also called for comprehensive rehabilitation measures, including medical care, psychological counseling, and social reintegration support. The Court stressed the state's obligation to create an environment where children feel safe to report abuse without fear of stigma or retaliation.

### **Impact and Significance**

The Shilpa Mittal judgment marked a significant advancement in child rights jurisprudence by foregrounding the principle of child-sensitive justice. It reinforced the comprehensive nature of POCSO and the need for its strict implementation across all states.

The case contributed to awareness and training initiatives for law enforcement officials, judicial officers, and child welfare workers to handle sexual abuse cases with empathy and professionalism.

It also spurred the creation of protocols and guidelines for fast-track courts dealing with child sexual offenses, ensuring expedited trials to minimize the duration of trauma for victims.

## Limitations and Critique

While the judgment set a high standard for child-sensitive procedures, implementation challenges remain widespread. Many police stations and courts lack adequate facilities and trained personnel, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The judicial focus on procedural reforms, though critical, needs to be complemented by broader societal efforts to combat stigma and silence around child sexual abuse. Cultural taboos and patriarchal attitudes often hinder reporting and effective intervention.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, rehabilitation services remain unevenly available, with significant gaps in mental health support and social reintegration programs for victims.

### 3.3. Interpretive analysis using each Pañcāṅga limb

The **Pañcāṅga**, an ancient Hindu framework traditionally used for calendrical and astrological calculations, offers more than just a means to mark time; it presents a profound hermeneutic structure. When applied to the field of jurisprudence, particularly Indian child rights law, Pañcāṅga's five limbs—**Upakrama (Beginning)**, **Upasamhāra (Conclusion)**, **Abhyāsa (Repetition)**, **Apūrvatā (Novelty)**, and **Phala (Result/Outcome)**—serve as an insightful interpretive methodology. This framework provides a structured yet flexible lens through which the complexities of child rights legislation and judicial interpretation in India can be understood. By grounding interpretation within this culturally resonant model, child rights jurisprudence becomes not only legally robust but also socially and culturally attuned.<sup>75</sup>

#### **Upakrama (Beginning): Establishing Foundational Principles**

The **Upakrama**, or beginning, constitutes the foundation on which all interpretation rests. In the context of child rights jurisprudence in India, this involves the identification and articulation of core principles that frame all subsequent analysis. Central among these is the **best interest of the child**, a principle that functions as the moral and legal lodestar in child protection and welfare matters.<sup>76</sup>

India's Constitution, while not explicitly codifying a specific article solely dedicated to children's rights, incorporates child welfare within its broad protections and directives. For example, **Article 15(3)** permits the state to make special provisions for children, recognizing their vulnerability and the need for affirmative action. Likewise, **Article 21**, guaranteeing the right to life and personal liberty, has been expansively interpreted by the judiciary to include a child's right to survival, development, and dignity.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> M K Ramesh, 'Judicial Humanism and Child Rights in India' (2021) 14 *NUJS Law Review* 233.

<sup>75</sup> K T Pandurangi, *Mīmāṃsā and the Hermeneutics of Dharma* (D.K. Printworld 2012).

<sup>76</sup> *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v Union of India* (1984) 3 SCC 161 (SC).

<sup>77</sup> Constitution of India, arts 15(3) and 21.

Complementing this constitutional basis is India's commitment to international instruments such as the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**. Ratified by India in 1992, the CRC's principles have profoundly influenced domestic jurisprudence, reinforcing the need to protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and discrimination, and to provide avenues for education and rehabilitation.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the Upakrama phase frames the interpretive exercise by affirming that the Indian legal system views children not merely as passive recipients of care but as holders of rights whose dignity and development must be actively protected. It calls for a child-centric approach that prioritizes welfare above all else and serves as a guiding principle for courts and legislators alike.

### **Upasamhāra (Conclusion): Synthesizing Judicial and Legislative Objectives**

Following the establishment of foundational principles, the **Upasamhāra**, or conclusion, seeks to bring together diverse strands of legislative enactments and judicial pronouncements into a unified framework that effectively serves the child's best interests.

Indian child rights legislation encompasses a range of statutes tailored to different aspects of child protection. The **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015** focuses on children in conflict with the law as well as those in need of care and protection, prescribing a rehabilitative and restorative approach rather than a punitive one. The **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009** guarantees education as a fundamental right, emphasizing accessibility and equity. The **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012** specifically addresses sexual abuse and exploitation, strengthening the legal framework to respond sensitively and effectively to such crimes.<sup>79</sup>

Courts have played a pivotal role in interpreting these laws to ensure their effective implementation. The Supreme Court of India, through various landmark decisions, has underscored the state's duty to protect vulnerable children and uphold their rights. For instance, in *Sheela Barse v. Union of India*, the court highlighted the systemic failures in protecting juvenile prisoners, mandating reformatory measures. In *Lalita Kumari v. Government of UP*<sup>80</sup>, the judiciary insisted on the prompt registration of complaints relating to crimes against children, emphasizing the state's responsibility to act swiftly.

The Upasamhāra limb facilitates the synthesis of these legislative and judicial directions, creating a cohesive jurisprudential narrative that places child welfare at the center. It recognizes the importance of adapting laws to the socio-cultural

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<sup>78</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (ratified by India, 11 December 1992).

<sup>79</sup> Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015; Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012; Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (India).

<sup>80</sup> *Lalita Kumari v Government of Uttar Pradesh* (2014) 2 SCC 1 (SC).

realities of India, where issues such as poverty, gender inequality, caste discrimination, and illiteracy intersect with child rights concerns. This synthesis ensures that the legal framework is not fragmented but is instead a coherent and comprehensive system aimed at holistic child development.<sup>81</sup>

### **Abhyāsa (Repetition): Reinforcing Recurring Themes in Jurisprudence**

The third limb, **Abhyāsa**, pertains to the importance of repetition or revisiting core themes to solidify their role in interpretation and application. In child rights jurisprudence, certain principles repeatedly emerge as fundamental, providing continuity and consistency across statutes and judicial decisions.

One such recurring theme is the emphasis on **protection**. Indian law consistently prioritizes safeguarding children from exploitation, abuse, and neglect. The Anti-Child Labour Act, POCSO, and Juvenile Justice Act all underscore this theme, reinforced by judicial mandates that call for proactive state intervention.

Another persistent focus is on **rehabilitation and social reintegration**<sup>82</sup>. The Indian legal system increasingly views juvenile offenders not as criminals but as individuals requiring care, counseling, and rehabilitation. This theme recurs across legislation and judgments, reflecting a progressive shift from punitive justice to restorative justice.<sup>83</sup>

The right to **education** is another theme continuously reinforced through various enactments and court rulings. Education is recognized not only as a fundamental right but also as a key to breaking the cycle of poverty and exploitation. The judiciary has repeatedly emphasized the state's obligation to remove barriers to education and ensure its quality.

By repeatedly invoking these themes, **Abhyāsa** ensures that child rights jurisprudence remains consistent and reliable. This repetition fosters institutional memory within the judiciary and legislature, helping to maintain the integrity of child protection frameworks even as new challenges arise.

### **Apūrvatā (Novelty): Embracing Innovation in Legal Interpretation**

While repetition is essential, the Pañcāṅga framework also values **Apūrvatā**, the introduction of novelty or innovation, which is critical for responding to evolving social contexts and emerging threats to child welfare.

The rapid development of technology, urbanization, and changing family structures have brought new challenges to the forefront. Children today face risks such as cyberbullying, online sexual exploitation, and exposure to harmful digital content, issues that traditional child protection laws did not anticipate.

Judicial activism and legislative amendments have increasingly recognized these realities. Recent judgments have broadened the interpretation of privacy rights for

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<sup>81</sup> A K Koul, 'Integrative Jurisprudence and the Indian Welfare State' (2020) 6 *Indian Law Review* 88.

<sup>82</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), *National Policy for Children 2013*.

<sup>83</sup> *M.C. Mehta v State of Tamil Nadu* (1996) 6 SCC 756 (SC).

children, acknowledging their vulnerability in the digital age<sup>84</sup>. For example, courts have protected children's rights to privacy on social media platforms and emphasized the state's duty to regulate online content harmful to minors.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, social shifts, such as increased migration and displacement, have necessitated legal innovations that account for the intersectionality of child rights—where gender, caste, disability, and economic status influence the protection and opportunities available to children.

This Apūrvatā limb ensures that Indian child rights jurisprudence is dynamic and forward-looking.<sup>86</sup> It prevents stagnation, enabling the legal framework to remain relevant and responsive in an ever-changing world.

### **Phala (Result/Outcome): Focusing on Practical Implications and Impact**

Finally, the **Phala**, or result/outcome, highlights the importance of ensuring that legal interpretation leads to tangible, positive changes in children's lives.<sup>87</sup> This limb moves beyond theory to consider the effectiveness of laws and judicial orders in practice.

In India, the impact of child rights jurisprudence is visible in several areas. Policy reforms influenced by judicial activism have led to better funding for child welfare programs, improved monitoring mechanisms for child labor, and the establishment of child-friendly courts that provide supportive environments for children during legal proceedings.<sup>88</sup>

Implementation strategies, such as the creation of child welfare committees and collaboration with NGOs, demonstrate a focus on translating legal principles into practical realities<sup>89</sup>. This outcome-oriented approach ensures that the interpretation of laws benefits children directly, through enhanced protection, better access to education, and more effective rehabilitation.

Phala emphasizes accountability and continuous evaluation, urging policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary to work cohesively towards achieving the intended welfare objectives.<sup>90</sup>

## **Chapter – 4 - Interdisciplinary Insights: Law, Society, and Child Psychology**

### **4.3. Limitations of current child protection frameworks**

Child protection remains a critical area of social policy and legal intervention in India, a country home to a vast population of children facing diverse vulnerabilities. Over the years, India has enacted numerous laws and adopted

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<sup>84</sup> *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2017) 10 SCC 1 (SC)

<sup>85</sup> National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), *Crime in India 2023: Crimes Against Children*.

<sup>86</sup> Elisa Freschi, *Duty, Language and Exegesis in Prābhākara Mīmāṃsā* (Brill 2012).

<sup>87</sup> UNICEF India, *Child Protection: Progress and Challenges 2024*.

<sup>88</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Integrated Child Protection Scheme Framework 2022*.

<sup>89</sup> *Court on Its Own Motion v State of NCT of Delhi* (2013) 204 DLT 289 (Del HC).

<sup>90</sup> S Bidyut, 'Hermeneutical Pluralism and Indian Jurisprudence: Reclaiming Indigenous Frameworks' (2023) 5 *Indian Journal of Legal Philosophy* 119.

policies aimed at protecting children from abuse, exploitation, neglect, and trafficking. Landmark legislation such as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015<sup>91</sup>, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012<sup>92</sup>, have marked significant progress. Yet, despite these legal and institutional advancements, the existing child protection frameworks continue to exhibit profound limitations that hinder their efficacy and comprehensiveness. This essay critically explores these limitations, focusing on the fragmented legislative environment, insufficient interdisciplinary integration, cultural insensitivity, systemic inadequacies, and the lack of child-centric approaches. It further suggests that innovative interpretative methodologies, such as Pañcāṅga hermeneutics, could provide valuable tools to bridge the divide between legal mandates and the complex realities faced by children in India.<sup>93</sup>

### **Fragmented Legislative and Institutional Frameworks**

A central issue undermining the effectiveness of child protection in India is the fragmented nature of the legal and institutional frameworks. India's child protection ecosystem comprises multiple laws addressing different aspects of child welfare, including the Juvenile Justice Act for care and rehabilitation, POCSO for sexual offences, the Child Labour Act <sup>94</sup>for economic exploitation, and several provisions under the Indian Penal Code<sup>95</sup> for criminal offences against children. While these laws collectively represent a robust body of legal instruments, their compartmentalized nature results in significant overlaps, gaps, and inconsistencies in application.<sup>96</sup>

This fragmentation often creates confusion among stakeholders, including law enforcement, child welfare committees, judiciary members, and social workers.<sup>97</sup> For instance, children in need of care and protection may fall into ambiguous zones where responsibilities overlap between juvenile justice boards, child protection committees, and police authorities, leading to delays and inefficiencies<sup>98</sup>. These siloed legal provisions do not always facilitate seamless cooperation or information sharing, which is essential for effective protection and rehabilitation.<sup>99</sup>

Institutionally, child protection functions are dispersed across various government ministries, departments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but

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<sup>91</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act*, No. 2 of 2016, Government of India.

<sup>92</sup> *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act*, No. 32 of 2012.

<sup>93</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), ratified by India in 1992.

<sup>94</sup> *Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act*, No. 61 of 1986.

<sup>95</sup> Indian Penal Code, 1860, Sections 82–87, 361–369.

<sup>96</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *National Policy for Children*, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> NCPCR, *Annual Report 2020–21*.

<sup>98</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules*, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Raj, A. & Sen, A. (2021). *Child Protection Governance in India*. *Indian Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12(1).

coordination mechanisms remain weak. For example, the Ministry of Women and Child Development is primarily responsible for child welfare schemes, but law enforcement and judiciary are overseen by different agencies with their priorities.<sup>100</sup> The absence of a unified institutional framework dedicated to child protection results in fragmented service delivery and often duplication of efforts, thereby undermining comprehensive child care.

### **Inadequate Interdisciplinary and Holistic Approaches**

Child protection inherently involves a complex interplay of legal, psychological, social, and economic factors.<sup>101</sup> However, current frameworks tend to emphasize legalistic interventions—focusing predominantly on law enforcement and judicial remedies—while paying insufficient attention to the psychosocial needs of children.<sup>102</sup>

For example, while the POCSO Act rigorously criminalizes sexual offences against children and ensures special courts for expedited trials, it often lacks mechanisms to provide adequate psychological support or trauma counseling to victims.<sup>103</sup> Many child victims of abuse require long-term therapeutic interventions and rehabilitation to overcome trauma, yet these aspects remain underemphasized within the legal process.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, children rescued from trafficking or child labor frequently face institutionalization without adequate focus on their education, psychological well-being, and community reintegration. The child protection system rarely adopts a multidisciplinary model where social workers, psychologists, educators, and legal professionals collaborate systematically. This absence of holistic care limits the prospects for true rehabilitation and reintegration, resulting in outcomes that are often superficial or temporary.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, child welfare interventions sometimes prioritize rescue and institutional placement without addressing the root socio-economic causes such as poverty, illiteracy, and social exclusion, which perpetuate child vulnerability.<sup>106</sup> Hence, child protection cannot be viewed solely as a legal challenge but must be integrated with broader social development and welfare strategies.

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<sup>100</sup> UNICEF India, *Child Protection: An Overview*, 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Bajpai, A. (2018). *Child Rights in India: Law, Policy, and Practice*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>102</sup> Ministry of Law and Justice, *Implementation Review of POCSO Act*, 2022.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> NCRB, *Crime in India Report 2022*.

<sup>105</sup> Balagopal, K. (2021). “Rehabilitation and Rights: Rethinking Institutional Care.” *EPW*, Vol. 56(42).

<sup>106</sup> Save the Children India, *Status of Child Protection Mechanisms*, 2021.

## **Cultural Insensitivity and Lack of Contextual Adaptation**

India's vast cultural diversity poses unique challenges for a uniform child protection system.<sup>107</sup> The country is home to multiple ethnic groups, religions, languages, and traditions, each with distinct norms concerning childhood, family, and community. Despite this diversity, current child protection frameworks largely apply standardized legal procedures and policies that fail to adequately accommodate these cultural variations.<sup>108</sup>

For example, certain communities may have traditional practices and dispute resolution mechanisms that conflict with statutory laws but are culturally significant for the people involved.<sup>109</sup> Tribal communities often prefer local panchayats or customary councils over formal courts for resolving disputes, including those involving children.<sup>110</sup> The imposition of formal legal processes without sensitivity to these local realities can alienate communities and reduce the likelihood of reporting abuse or cooperating with authorities.

Furthermore, the frameworks frequently marginalize the voices of children themselves, failing to create mechanisms that acknowledge children's perspectives shaped by their cultural contexts. Children's rights and needs are often interpreted through an adult-centric lens, resulting in interventions that may not resonate with the child's lived experiences or socio-cultural environment.<sup>111</sup>

The cultural insensitivity also extends to gender norms and expectations. In many parts of India, girls face systemic discrimination and heightened vulnerabilities, yet the child protection system's response may not be sufficiently gender-sensitive or tailored to address these nuanced challenges effectively.<sup>112</sup>

## **Systemic Challenges: Resource Constraints, Training Deficits, and Weak Implementation**

The efficacy of any legal framework depends significantly on the capacity of institutions to implement laws effectively<sup>113</sup>. In India, child protection systems face severe resource limitations that undermine their functioning.<sup>114</sup> Many child

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<sup>107</sup> Pandey, S. (2020). "Cultural Pluralism and Child Rights." *Indian Journal of Human Rights Law Review*.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> ILO, *Indigenous Justice and Child Protection in India*, 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> UNCRC General Comment No. 12, "The Right of the Child to be Heard" (2009).

<sup>112</sup> UNICEF, *Gender and Child Protection in India*, 2021.

<sup>113</sup> Sheela Barse v. Union of India, (1986) 3 SCC 632.

<sup>114</sup> *National Commission for Protection of Child Rights Report*, 2021.

welfare institutions, including child protection units, juvenile homes, and observation homes, operate with inadequate funding, infrastructure, and staff.<sup>115</sup>

A major limitation is the shortage of trained personnel who are well-versed in child rights, trauma-informed care, and specialized handling of child abuse cases. Police officers, social workers, and judiciary members frequently lack formal training to sensitively and effectively manage child protection cases.<sup>116</sup> This knowledge gap leads to procedural lapses, insensitivity towards victims, and sometimes re-victimization through the justice process.<sup>117</sup>

Implementation mechanisms also suffer from delays and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Legal proceedings related to child protection can be prolonged due to overloaded courts and procedural complexities, thereby denying timely justice. Additionally, monitoring and evaluation of child protection programs are weak, limiting the ability to assess impact, identify shortcomings, or make data-driven policy adjustments.<sup>118</sup>

Corruption and lack of accountability further exacerbate systemic weaknesses<sup>119</sup>. In some cases, child protection officers or officials may neglect responsibilities due to apathy or malfeasance, contributing to persistent impunity and under-reporting of offences.

### **Insufficient Child-Centricity and Participation**

Despite international commitments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>120</sup>, which emphasizes children's participation in decisions affecting them, the Indian child protection system remains largely adult-driven.<sup>121</sup> Children's voices are often marginalized or ignored in case proceedings and policy formulation.<sup>122</sup>

Effective child protection must involve creating safe, child-friendly mechanisms for reporting abuse, accessing justice, and participating in rehabilitation plans. However, these mechanisms remain underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented across the country. Many children do not feel safe or empowered to express their experiences, especially in patriarchal or hierarchical social settings.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, protection strategies tend to prioritize institutionalization as a default solution, which may overlook family or community-based care alternatives that

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<sup>115</sup> Shilpa Mittal v. Union of India, (2013) 14 SCC 643.

<sup>116</sup> Salil Bali v. Union of India, (2012) 13 SCC 654.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> NITI Aayog, *Children's Welfare Index Report*, 2020.

<sup>119</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Broken System: Child Protection in India*, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989.

<sup>121</sup> Ministry of Women and Child Development, *National Action Plan for Children*, 2016.

<sup>122</sup> NCPCR, *Child Participation Framework*, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> UNICEF India, *Building Child-Friendly Systems*, 2022.

align better with children’s emotional and social needs<sup>124</sup>. Such institutional care can sometimes isolate children further and expose them to new vulnerabilities. Enhancing child participation requires systemic reforms that empower children, recognize their agency, and tailor interventions to uphold their dignity and rights.<sup>125</sup>

## **Chapter – 5 - Toward a Contextual and Culturally Rooted Jurisprudence**

### **5.1. Benefits of integrating IKS with modern child rights law**

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern child rights law presents a unique and profound opportunity to enhance the efficacy, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of legal protections for children<sup>126</sup>. Indian Knowledge Systems, deeply rooted in centuries of philosophical, social, and ethical thought, provide alternative ways of understanding human relationships, time, and community responsibilities that differ fundamentally from Western legal traditions<sup>127</sup>. The Pañcāṅga hermeneutic framework—a traditional Indian epistemic system based on cyclical conceptions of time and relationality—serves as a prime example of how indigenous worldviews can enrich modern jurisprudence<sup>128</sup>. This integration brings multiple benefits: it ensures cultural resonance and contextual sensitivity, enriches legal reasoning, promotes holistic child welfare, acknowledges community roles, allows adaptability to social changes, enhances legitimacy and accessibility of the law, and complements universal human rights norms with indigenous perspectives.<sup>129</sup>

### **Cultural Resonance and Contextual Sensitivity**

A significant benefit of incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems into child rights law is the enhanced cultural resonance and contextual sensitivity it affords. Child rights legislation derived solely from Western legal traditions often struggles to align with the diverse socio-cultural realities of India’s population. Western models tend to emphasize individual autonomy and universal principles that may not always resonate with the collective ethos prevalent in many Indian communities.<sup>130</sup>

The Pañcāṅga framework, for example, understands time as cyclical rather than linear and interprets events and relationships within an interconnected temporal continuum. This contrasts sharply with the linear, cause-and-effect approach

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Balagopal, K. (2021). *Rehabilitation and Rights*.

<sup>126</sup> Bajpai, A. (2018). *Child Rights in India: Law, Policy, and Practice*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>127</sup> Sen, A. (2020). “Indigenous Epistemologies and Child Rights.” *Indian Journal of Legal Philosophy*, Vol. 14.

<sup>128</sup> Sharma, R. (2022). “Pañcāṅga and Jurisprudence.” *Journal of Indic Studies*, Vol. 9(3).

<sup>129</sup> UNESCO, *Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Justice*, 2021.

<sup>130</sup> Pandey, S. (2020). “Cultural Pluralism and Child Rights.” *Indian Journal of Human Rights Law Review*.

common in Western legal systems. By applying a cyclical lens, legal interpretation becomes more flexible and context-aware, appreciating how children's rights and duties evolve in relation to family, community, and society over time.<sup>131</sup>

Such culturally attuned interpretations are more likely to be accepted and internalized by families and local communities, facilitating smoother implementation of child rights protections.<sup>132</sup> When the law speaks the language of indigenous epistemologies, it becomes less alien and more effective in real-life applications. This fosters compliance and cooperation rather than resistance or superficial observance.<sup>133</sup>

### **Enriching Legal Reasoning: Cyclical and Relational Perspectives**

Indian Knowledge Systems bring valuable conceptual tools to legal reasoning, especially through their cyclical and relational perspectives<sup>134</sup>. Whereas Western legal thought often prioritizes discrete, individual-centric rights and a linear temporality, Indian epistemologies emphasize continuity, relationality, and holistic integration.

In child rights law, this approach encourages a shift from fragmented and episodic interventions to sustained care and protection seen as an ongoing process embedded within relationships<sup>135</sup>. The Pañcāṅga framework's emphasis on interconnectedness allows legal systems to recognize the child not as an isolated legal subject but as a member of a broader social and familial network. This relational view better reflects the reality of many Indian children's lives, where care and protection are shared responsibilities.<sup>136</sup>

Such reasoning supports legal frameworks that accommodate communal involvement in child welfare, strengthening guardianship, education, and social support systems beyond the individual family unit. It also fosters restorative approaches in cases of child abuse or neglect, drawing on traditional conflict resolution methods rooted in social harmony and collective responsibility.<sup>137</sup>

### **Promoting Holistic Child Welfare**

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into child rights law promotes a holistic understanding of child welfare, encompassing physical, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions.<sup>138</sup> Modern child rights law, while comprehensive in theory, can

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Sharma, R., 2022, supra note 3.

<sup>133</sup> UNICEF, *Child Protection and Community Systems in India*, 2020.

<sup>134</sup> Balagopal, K. (2021). "Rehabilitation and Rights: Rethinking Institutional Care." *EPW*, Vol. 56(42).

<sup>135</sup> Bajpai, A., 2018, supra note 1.

<sup>136</sup> Sharma, R., 2022, supra note 3.

<sup>137</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act*, 2015.

<sup>138</sup> Nanda, M. (2019). "Āyurvedic Ethics and Child Development." *Journal of Indic Psychology*.

sometimes lean toward a rights-based approach that isolates legal protections from the broader lived experiences of children.

Indian epistemologies, particularly those embedded in Pañcāṅga and allied traditions, emphasize the interconnectedness of mind, body, spirit, and community well-being. This holistic view encourages policies and legal interventions that attend to all aspects of a child's development—nutrition, education, mental health, cultural identity, and community belonging<sup>139</sup>.

This comprehensive framework is especially important in diverse Indian contexts where children's well-being is shaped by multiple, overlapping factors. By acknowledging these varied influences, child rights law can facilitate more inclusive and responsive welfare strategies that go beyond legal formalities to address the root causes of vulnerability and marginalization.

### **Recognizing Community Roles and Collective Responsibility**

A further benefit of integrating IKS lies in recognizing the vital role communities play in child protection and development.<sup>140</sup> Many indigenous Indian cultures prioritize collective responsibility and view child-rearing as a shared endeavor. Modern child rights law, focusing heavily on the state and nuclear family, often overlooks this communal dimension.

Indian Knowledge Systems, by contrast, acknowledge the roles of extended family, village councils, religious institutions, and social networks in nurturing children. The Pañcāṅga hermeneutic framework provides interpretative guidance that centers these communal ties as essential to a child's upbringing.<sup>141</sup>

Incorporating this communal perspective into legal frameworks fosters cooperation between formal legal institutions and traditional governance structures<sup>142</sup>. It empowers communities to participate actively in child protection efforts, ensuring culturally appropriate interventions and enhancing the social safety net for children.

Furthermore, this approach promotes collective accountability for child rights violations, shifting the focus from individual blame to shared social responsibility.<sup>143</sup> It also strengthens resilience within communities to prevent and respond to child abuse, exploitation, and neglect.

### **Adaptability to Changing Social Conditions**

The dynamic nature of Indian Knowledge Systems, particularly their cyclical conception of time, offers modern child rights law an essential tool for adaptability.<sup>144</sup> India is a society marked by rapid social change, including

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<sup>139</sup> *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act*, 2009.

<sup>140</sup> UNESCO, 2021, *supra* note 4.

<sup>141</sup> ILO, *Indigenous Justice and Child Protection in India*, 2019.

<sup>142</sup> UNICEF, 2020, *supra* note 8.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> NITI Aayog, *Children and Digital Futures Report*, 2021.

urbanization, migration, technological advancement, and evolving family structures.

Modern legal frameworks can become rigid, struggling to accommodate such fluid contexts. However, the interpretative flexibility inherent in systems like the Pañcāṅga enables child rights law to evolve in response to new realities while maintaining cultural coherence.

This adaptability supports the development of legal mechanisms that are both forward-looking and grounded in tradition. It allows the law to incorporate emerging social challenges—such as digital safety, child labor in informal sectors, and new educational needs—without losing sight of enduring cultural values and community structures.<sup>145</sup>

### **Enhancing Legitimacy and Accessibility of Child Rights Law**

Integrating indigenous epistemologies significantly enhances the legitimacy of child rights law in the eyes of the people it serves. Laws that reflect local worldviews and social practices are more likely to be regarded as legitimate, fostering respect and voluntary compliance.<sup>146</sup>

Furthermore, when legal frameworks incorporate familiar interpretive systems like the Pañcāṅga, they become more accessible to the general population. This accessibility is critical in India's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape, where formal legal language and procedures often alienate those with limited legal literacy.

Culturally resonant frameworks encourage broader participation in legal processes, empowering families and communities to claim rights and seek remedies. This democratic engagement improves the efficacy of child rights protections by ensuring that legal mechanisms respond to the actual needs and realities of children.<sup>147</sup>

### **Complementing Universal Human Rights with Indigenous Epistemologies**

While universal human rights instruments provide essential protections for children globally, they are sometimes criticized for lacking cultural sensitivity or imposing Western values. Indian Knowledge Systems offer a valuable complement to universal norms by providing interpretive frameworks that situate rights within indigenous worldviews.<sup>148</sup>

This synergy enriches the application of universal principles, making them more meaningful in local contexts.<sup>149</sup> For example, the right to education is interpreted

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<sup>145</sup> Sharma, R., 2022, supra note 3.

<sup>146</sup> Raj & Sen, 2021. *Child Protection Governance in India*. *Indian Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 12(1).

<sup>147</sup> UNICEF, 2020, supra note 8.

<sup>148</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989.

<sup>149</sup> Bajpai, A., 2018, supra note 1.

not merely as formal schooling but as an inclusive process that respects traditional knowledge, languages, and community teachings.

This pluralistic approach fosters dialogue between global human rights discourse and indigenous knowledge, encouraging mutual enrichment. It also allows for the localization of child rights, ensuring protections are both universal in principle and particular in practice.<sup>150</sup>

### **Supporting Sustainable and Inclusive Child Development**

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems with child rights law supports sustainable and inclusive child development. IKS, including the Pañcāṅga framework, emphasize harmony between humans and nature, continuity of cultural heritage, and social cohesion.

Legal frameworks informed by these values promote development strategies that are environmentally sustainable, culturally respectful, and socially inclusive. They encourage policies that not only safeguard children's immediate welfare but also nurture their long-term capacities within their communities and environments.

This comprehensive vision aligns closely with contemporary international development goals, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reinforcing India's commitments to children's rights within broader social and ecological systems.

### **5.2. Challenges to implementation**

The integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into contemporary legal frameworks presents both significant promise and considerable complexity<sup>151</sup>. While IKS offer invaluable perspectives on community governance, environmental stewardship, and social justice, their implementation within dominant legal institutions remains fraught with challenges. These challenges arise from historical legacies, epistemological differences, institutional barriers, and practical concerns, which collectively complicate the process of meaningful integration.<sup>152</sup> This essay explores these multifaceted challenges in detail, highlighting the obstacles faced and the pathways needed to facilitate a respectful, effective incorporation of IKS into modern legal systems.

### **Entrenched Dominance of Western Legal Paradigms**

A foremost challenge is the prevailing dominance of Western legal paradigms that shape most contemporary legal systems globally. These paradigms are rooted in colonial histories and emphasize codified laws, written records, formal

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<sup>150</sup> UNESCO, 2021, *supra* note 4.

<sup>151</sup> Sharma, R., 2022, *supra* note 3.

<sup>152</sup> UNESCO, 2021, *supra* note 4.

adjudication, and universal principles<sup>153</sup>. Legal education, judiciary structures, and policymaking processes reflect these paradigms, often rendering Indigenous Knowledge Systems peripheral or illegible within mainstream legal discourse.

Western legal systems typically prioritize individual rights, rule-based governance, and procedural formalism. Conversely, many indigenous legal traditions emphasize collective rights, relationality, and context-sensitive processes rooted in oral traditions and communal memory. This divergence creates fundamental epistemological tensions. Western-trained judges and lawyers may perceive indigenous laws as informal, inconsistent, or lacking authoritative legitimacy. Such perceptions can result in resistance or reluctance to incorporate IKS into legal decision-making.<sup>154</sup>

Moreover, the institutionalization of Western legal education perpetuates this dominance. Indigenous jurisprudence and epistemologies are often absent or marginalized in law schools and continuing legal education programs. This omission fosters a lack of familiarity, appreciation, and expertise among legal practitioners, which further entrenches barriers to integration<sup>155</sup>. The dominance of Western paradigms thus functions not only as an intellectual hegemony but as an institutionalized system that privileges certain forms of knowledge while marginalizing others.

### **Complexity of Translating Indigenous Hermeneutics into Legal Instruments**

A central technical challenge lies in the process of translating indigenous hermeneutics—the cultural and interpretive frameworks through which indigenous communities understand and apply knowledge—into forms that can be effectively integrated within contemporary legal systems.<sup>156</sup>

Indigenous hermeneutic methods are deeply embedded in specific cultural contexts, languages, spiritual beliefs, and oral traditions. These interpretive frameworks often resist reduction into written, codified laws because their meaning relies heavily on relational contexts, community memory, and dynamic social norms.<sup>157</sup> Formal legal systems, in contrast, require clear, stable, and generalizable rules that can be applied consistently.

This translation challenge is twofold. First, there is the risk that codification or formal recognition of indigenous legal principles might strip them of their cultural specificity and flexibility, reducing vibrant, living traditions into static legal texts that fail to capture their original intent. Second, there is the challenge of adapting these principles without distorting or misinterpreting them, which requires deep

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<sup>153</sup> Baxi, U. (2020). *Postcolonial Legal Thought in India*. Cambridge UP.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Bajpai, A., 2018, *supra* note 1.

<sup>156</sup> ILO, 2019, *supra* note 16.

<sup>157</sup> Sen, 2020, *supra* note 2.

cultural competency and continuous collaboration with indigenous knowledge holders.<sup>158</sup>

For example, customary dispute resolution mechanisms based on reconciliation and restoration might be misunderstood when forced into adversarial legal frameworks.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, indigenous concepts of land stewardship tied to spiritual values may not align easily with property law principles rooted in individual ownership. Bridging these differences demands interdisciplinary efforts, including legal scholars, anthropologists, linguists, and community elders, to co-develop interpretive frameworks that honor both indigenous hermeneutics and formal legal requirements.

### **Internal Diversity and Plurality of Indigenous Knowledge Traditions**

Another significant challenge is the vast diversity and plurality within indigenous knowledge traditions themselves. Indigenous peoples are not a homogeneous group; their knowledge systems vary widely across regions, languages, social structures, and historical experiences<sup>160</sup>.

For example, within India alone, there exist numerous tribal communities, each with distinct customary laws, rituals, and dispute resolution mechanisms.<sup>161</sup> These differences complicate efforts to create standardized or uniform legal recognition frameworks for IKS. Attempts to impose singular models risk erasing local variations, privileging certain traditions over others, and potentially creating internal conflicts within and between communities.

This plurality challenges legal systems that prefer clear, uniform rules. Unlike dominant legal systems that codify laws applicable universally across a territory, indigenous legal norms often function at the community or clan level and are adapted continuously to changing circumstances. Institutionalizing such fluid and diverse systems within rigid state frameworks is complex and may inadvertently undermine indigenous autonomy.<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, some indigenous communities may resist formal recognition precisely because it could impose external norms that disrupt their internal governance. Recognizing this diversity requires a flexible, pluralistic legal approach that respects local self-determination and avoids the pitfalls of homogenization.

### **Institutional Inertia and Resistance to Change**

Institutional inertia within state legal and administrative bodies presents a formidable obstacle to integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems.<sup>163</sup> Legal institutions often operate within established procedural frameworks, with hierarchies and cultures that resist innovation or perceived challenges to authority.

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<sup>158</sup> Sharma, 2022, *supra* note 3.

<sup>159</sup> UNESCO, 2021, *supra* note 4.

<sup>160</sup> Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *Report on Customary Laws of Scheduled Tribes*, 2020.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Baxi, 2020, *supra* note 28.

<sup>163</sup> Raj & Sen, 2021, *supra* note 21.

Judicial systems, for example, may be reluctant to incorporate indigenous legal principles because they require additional interpretive effort, unfamiliar evidentiary forms, or the involvement of non-traditional actors such as community elders. Bureaucratic agencies might lack the mandate, resources, or incentives to engage with indigenous legal claims seriously.

This resistance is not always explicit or overt; it can manifest through slow procedural adoption, inadequate training, or symbolic rather than substantive engagement. Such institutional inertia hampers the creation of legal pluralism, reinforcing the dominance of formal state law.<sup>164</sup>

Overcoming institutional resistance requires deliberate policy measures, including judicial training on indigenous laws, institutional reforms to facilitate indigenous participation in legal processes, and the establishment of specialized bodies or commissions focused on indigenous legal affairs.<sup>165</sup> Without systemic change within institutions, the recognition of IKS risks remaining superficial or symbolic.

### **Lack of Awareness and Educational Gaps**

A critical practical challenge is the pervasive lack of awareness and understanding of Indigenous Knowledge Systems among legal practitioners, policymakers, and the broader public. This deficit stems largely from the absence of indigenous legal traditions in formal education curricula and professional training.<sup>166</sup>

Legal education rarely incorporates indigenous jurisprudence, leading to generations of lawyers and judges unfamiliar with the principles, practices, and values that underpin IKS. This educational gap translates into limited capacity to recognize or apply indigenous knowledge in legal proceedings.

Similarly, policymakers may not appreciate the social and cultural significance of IKS or their potential contributions to sustainable development, environmental protection, and conflict resolution. Without broad-based awareness, efforts to integrate IKS into legal frameworks risk being underfunded, poorly designed, or opposed.

Addressing this gap requires systemic inclusion of indigenous legal knowledge in law schools, judicial training programs, and policymaker education<sup>167</sup>. It also necessitates outreach and public education campaigns to raise the profile and legitimacy of IKS.

### **Conflicts Between Customary Practices and Constitutional or Human Rights Norms**

Perhaps one of the most delicate challenges concerns the potential conflicts between indigenous customary practices and constitutional mandates or internationally recognized human rights standards.

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<sup>164</sup> NCPCR, *Annual Report*, 2021.

<sup>165</sup> UNICEF, *Building Child-Friendly Systems*, 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Bajpai, 2018, *supra* note 1.

<sup>167</sup> UNESCO, 2021, *supra* note 4.

Certain indigenous customs or traditional laws may contravene constitutional principles such as equality, non-discrimination, or individual rights. For instance, some customary practices related to gender roles, succession, or punishment might be at odds with constitutional protections against discrimination.<sup>168</sup>

Legal systems must navigate these conflicts carefully to ensure that recognition of IKS does not perpetuate injustices or violate fundamental rights. This balancing act requires ongoing dialogue between indigenous communities, human rights advocates, and legal authorities to identify areas of tension and work collaboratively toward solutions.<sup>169</sup>

Adaptive legal frameworks might allow for the modification of certain customs to align with human rights norms without undermining cultural integrity.<sup>170</sup> However, this is a politically and legally sensitive process that requires trust, negotiation, and respect for indigenous agency.

### **Challenges Related to Documentation and Intellectual Property Rights**

Another significant barrier to the implementation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems within legal frameworks concerns issues of documentation, ownership, and protection, particularly regarding intellectual property rights (IPR).<sup>171</sup>

Indigenous knowledge is often collective, transmitted orally, and intimately tied to cultural identity and spiritual beliefs. Conventional IPR regimes, based on individual ownership, limited durations, and formal registration, inadequately protect such knowledge from misappropriation or exploitation by external actors. Moreover, documenting indigenous knowledge to protect it legally poses risks of exposing sacred or sensitive information, potentially violating cultural protocols or consent.

Developing *sui generis* legal protections that respect communal ownership, cultural sensitivity, and equitable benefit-sharing remains a complex task. It requires innovative legal instruments tailored to indigenous realities and supported by participatory processes.<sup>172</sup>

### **Need for Sustained Dialogue and Capacity Building**

Addressing the above challenges calls for sustained dialogue among indigenous peoples, legal institutions, policymakers, civil society, and scholars. Building mutual understanding and trust is fundamental to co-creating legal frameworks that genuinely integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems.<sup>173</sup>

Capacity building is equally essential. Indigenous communities must be empowered with legal literacy and technical support to articulate their knowledge

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<sup>168</sup> *Indian Constitution*, Articles 14, 15, 21.

<sup>169</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Broken System: Child Protection in India*, 2019.

<sup>170</sup> Baxi, 2020, *supra* note 28.

<sup>171</sup> WIPO, *Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions: Indian Framework*, 2021.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> UNICEF, 2022, *supra* note 40.

in forms compatible with formal law<sup>174</sup>. Simultaneously, legal professionals require cultural competence and training to appreciate and apply indigenous legal principles.

Participatory institutions such as indigenous tribunals, advisory councils, or hybrid courts can provide models for inclusive governance and dispute resolution that bridge indigenous and state legal orders.

### **5.3. Policy and judicial recommendations**

The protection and promotion of children's rights in India require an approach that is not only legally sound but also sensitive to the diverse cultural realities that characterize the country. India's vast heterogeneity in terms of languages, traditions, social practices, and indigenous knowledge systems demands a jurisprudence that is contextualized and culturally rooted. Child rights cannot be effectively safeguarded through rigid legal frameworks alone, divorced from the lived experiences and value systems of the communities they are intended to serve. Therefore, policy and judicial interventions must aim to bridge this gap by integrating indigenous epistemologies and local contexts within the constitutional framework. This paper elaborates on the key policy and judicial recommendations necessary for fostering a child rights jurisprudence that is both culturally grounded and constitutionally robust.

#### **Policy-Level Recommendations**

##### **1. Integration of Indian Knowledge Systems in Legal Education and Training**

One of the foundational measures necessary to advance culturally grounded child rights jurisprudence is the systematic incorporation of Indian indigenous knowledge systems into the legal education and training curriculum for judges, lawyers, and policymakers. Presently, Indian legal education predominantly follows Western paradigms of law, which often overlook the rich interpretive traditions inherent in Indian culture. These indigenous frameworks include classical hermeneutic systems such as Pañcāṅga, ancient philosophies, and customary norms which shape local understandings of justice, rights, and social responsibilities.<sup>175</sup>

Integrating these knowledge systems into the formal curriculum would not only broaden the intellectual horizons of legal practitioners but also foster an appreciation for pluralism and contextual justice. Training programs should incorporate case studies, practical exercises, and comparative analyses that highlight how indigenous interpretive methods can be used to navigate complex child rights issues.<sup>176</sup> This education can dispel misconceptions and biases about

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<sup>174</sup> Ministry of Law & Justice, *Report on Legal Pluralism*, 2022.

<sup>175</sup> Bar Council of India, *Model Curriculum for Law*, 2021.

<sup>176</sup> NLU Delhi, *Centre for Indic Legal Systems*, 2023.

non-Western legal traditions, encouraging legal actors to view them as complementary rather than contradictory to constitutional mandates.

Furthermore, legal research institutions should develop dedicated chairs and centers focused on the study of Indian legal hermeneutics and their contemporary application, particularly in the field of child rights. This would create a scholarly foundation that supports evidence-based policymaking and judicial reasoning.

## **2. Promoting Research and Documentation on Indigenous Interpretive Practices**

An evidence-based approach to policy formulation and judicial decision-making necessitates extensive research and documentation of indigenous interpretive practices relevant to child welfare. Such research should explore how various communities understand the rights, duties, and protections related to children within their socio-cultural milieus.

Government bodies, academic institutions, and civil society organizations should collaborate to undertake ethnographic studies, oral histories, and legal-anthropological research.<sup>177</sup> This would reveal the nuances of customary child-rearing practices, conflict resolution mechanisms, and social norms that have traditionally safeguarded children's interests. Documentation efforts should prioritize community participation to ensure authenticity and respect for local perspectives.

By creating a comprehensive repository of indigenous legal traditions, policymakers can better tailor child protection laws to address cultural specificities without compromising on universal principles such as non-discrimination, protection from exploitation, and access to education and healthcare<sup>178</sup>. Additionally, this research can inform culturally sensitive training modules for frontline child protection workers and legal professionals.

## **3. Formulating Flexible and Context-Sensitive Policy Frameworks**

Child rights policies at the national and state levels must be designed with flexibility to accommodate India's pluralistic social fabric. Recognizing the coexistence of statutory laws and customary norms, policies should articulate frameworks that permit contextual adaptation while upholding the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>179</sup>

For example, policies should explicitly allow for customary dispute resolution practices to be integrated into child protection mechanisms where appropriate, provided these do not violate core child rights. This approach respects community autonomy and empowers local actors, increasing the effectiveness and acceptance of legal interventions.

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<sup>177</sup> NITI Aayog, *Research on Customary Law Integration*, 2022.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> *National Policy for Children*, 2013.

To operationalize such flexibility, policymakers must engage in consultative processes involving traditional leaders, indigenous knowledge holders, child rights activists, and experts from relevant fields. These consultations ensure that policies resonate with the needs and realities of the communities they target, avoiding alienation or resistance.

Moreover, policy frameworks should emphasize preventative and rehabilitative measures rooted in community contexts rather than relying solely on punitive approaches.<sup>180</sup> Programs focusing on education, health, social inclusion, and awareness-raising tailored to specific cultural settings will better protect children from harm and neglect.

## **Judicial-Level Recommendations**

### **1. Proactive Use of Pañcāṅga Hermeneutics and Indigenous Interpretive Tools**

The judiciary has a pivotal role in shaping child rights jurisprudence that reflects cultural realities. Courts should proactively employ traditional interpretive methods such as the Pañcāṅga hermeneutic system when interpreting child rights laws. Pañcāṅga involves analyzing multiple dimensions — temporal, spatial, ethical, and social — enabling a holistic understanding of legal texts in context.

Applying such hermeneutics encourages a dynamic and flexible interpretation of statutes that accommodates cultural practices while safeguarding constitutional values. For example, in cases involving child custody, education rights, or protection from child labor, courts could consider traditional community norms that promote child welfare, provided these do not infringe upon fundamental rights.<sup>181</sup>

This approach fosters judicial sensitivity to the social realities and cultural diversities that influence children’s lives, resulting in rulings that are more meaningful and enforceable within local contexts. Furthermore, by explicitly referencing indigenous interpretive principles, courts contribute to the decolonization of legal reasoning, legitimizing non-Western epistemologies within India’s constitutional democracy.

### **2. Balancing Constitutional Mandates with Cultural Pluralism**

While respecting cultural diversity, courts must remain unwavering in upholding the fundamental rights of children enshrined in the Constitution. This balancing act requires judicial discernment to differentiate between cultural practices that enrich child welfare and those that violate children’s rights.

Judicial opinions should clarify that cultural norms are not immune from constitutional scrutiny, particularly when they perpetuate discrimination, exploitation, or harm to children. At the same time, courts should recognize and

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<sup>180</sup> Save the Children, *Community Child Protection Models*, 2021.

<sup>181</sup> Sharma, 2022, *supra* note 3.

protect positive cultural traditions that support children’s development, identity, and well-being.<sup>182</sup>

This balance can be achieved through a nuanced application of constitutional principles such as dignity, equality, and the best interests of the child, contextualized within cultural frameworks. For instance, the Supreme Court’s recognition of tribal customary laws alongside statutory laws in various rulings provides a useful precedent for integrating pluralism without compromising rights.

### **3. Emphasizing Dynamic and Context-Responsive Interpretation**

Given India’s rapidly evolving social landscape, judicial interpretation of child rights laws must be dynamic and responsive to contemporary challenges. Courts should move beyond literal statutory interpretation toward purposive and teleological readings that prioritize children’s evolving needs and aspirations.

This dynamism requires openness to interdisciplinary insights. Judges should regularly consult experts in child psychology, sociology, and anthropology to understand the developmental, social, and cultural dimensions affecting children. Such knowledge enables courts to frame judgments that are not only legally sound but also socially relevant.

Dynamic interpretation also supports adaptability in the face of emerging issues such as digital safety, child trafficking, and inclusive education for children with disabilities. Courts must continuously recalibrate their approach to ensure that legal protections keep pace with changing realities.<sup>183</sup>

## **Chapter – 6 - Conclusion**

### **6.1. Summary of insights**

This study undertakes a critical exploration of child rights jurisprudence in India, emphasizing the imperative of reinterpreting legal frameworks through indigenous philosophical traditions<sup>184</sup>. Specifically, it focuses on the application of the Pañcāṅga hermeneutic method—an interpretive approach rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems derived from the Mimamsa school of philosophy.<sup>185</sup> By doing so, the research aims to address limitations observed in prevailing Western interpretive frameworks, which, while foundational in global human rights discourse, often fail to capture the socio-cultural complexities and diverse contextual realities unique to India’s child rights landscape.<sup>186</sup>

The current child rights discourse within India is largely influenced by international conventions and Western jurisprudential thought, which prioritize

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<sup>182</sup> Supreme Court of India, *State of Nagaland v. Ratanwati* (2019).

<sup>183</sup> UNICEF, 2022, *supra* note 40.

<sup>184</sup> Usha Ramanathan, *Child Rights and the Law: Intersections and Dissonances* (2000).

<sup>185</sup> J.B. Chethimattam, *Hermeneutics and Language in Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* (1971).

<sup>186</sup> Agata Ciabattini et al., “Mīmāṃsā Deontic Logic: Proof Theory and Applications” (2018).

universal principles and standard legal interpretations.<sup>187</sup> However, this study demonstrates that such frameworks, though invaluable for establishing a baseline of rights, frequently lack sensitivity to localized customs, cultural plurality, and traditional social norms that continue to govern the lived experiences of children in India.<sup>188</sup> The insufficiency of these frameworks to accommodate India's socio-cultural specificity highlights the need for alternative interpretive tools that integrate indigenous epistemologies without compromising international human rights standards.<sup>189</sup>

Central to this investigation is the Pañcāṅga hermeneutic method, a fivefold interpretive framework derived from Mimamsa philosophy, which traditionally governs the exegesis of Vedic texts<sup>190</sup>. The five limbs of Pañcāṅga—Adhikarana (determination of the issue), Vishaya (subject matter), Samshaya (identification of doubt or conflict), Purvapaksha (presentation of prima facie or opposing views), and Siddhanta (conclusive reasoning)—form a systematic approach to resolving interpretive dilemmas through reasoned dialectics.<sup>191</sup> The strength of this methodology lies in its capacity to balance textual fidelity with contextual understanding, thereby allowing for a nuanced and culturally resonant interpretation of legal provisions.<sup>192</sup>

Importantly, this study does not suggest discarding Western jurisprudence; rather, it advocates for a dialogic synthesis wherein Indian Knowledge Systems complement global human rights frameworks<sup>193</sup>. Such integration ensures that legal interpretation remains grounded in India's pluralistic heritage while remaining aligned with universal principles<sup>194</sup>. This balanced approach also reinforces judicial legitimacy by enhancing the cultural resonance of decisions, thereby fostering greater acceptance and compliance among diverse communities.<sup>195</sup>

The research further identifies the critical role of interdisciplinary approaches in enriching child rights interpretation.<sup>196</sup> Social sciences—particularly

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<sup>187</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children – India Report* (2022).

<sup>188</sup> Leena Abraham, *Sexuality, Stigma, and Rights: Understanding Adolescent Health in India* (2014).

<sup>189</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (1999).

<sup>190</sup> Krishnacharya T. Pandurangī, “Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā from an Interdisciplinary Point of View” (2015).

<sup>191</sup> Elisa Freschi, *Studies on Mīmāṃsā Interpretation and Epistemology* (2017).

<sup>192</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>193</sup> M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (1966).

<sup>194</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, supra note 6.

<sup>195</sup> Usha Ramanathan, supra note 1.

<sup>196</sup> Shekhar Seshadri et al., “Psychosocial Perspectives on Child Mental Health in Custody Disputes” (2018).

anthropology, sociology, and developmental psychology—offer vital insights into the multifaceted nature of childhood in India, including the influence of poverty, caste dynamics, gender disparities, and educational access.<sup>197</sup> The Pañcāṅga method's systematic structure allows for the incorporation of these diverse perspectives into the interpretive process, promoting decisions that are both legally sound and socially responsive.<sup>198</sup>

Another notable insight from the study is the potential of Pañcāṅga to cultivate judicial empathy and ethical engagement. By requiring judges to critically examine prima facie doubts and competing interpretations, the method encourages a more thoughtful and morally attuned adjudication process. This shift is particularly crucial in a culturally diverse and stratified society like India, where child welfare issues often intersect with complex familial, communal, and economic considerations. Enhanced judicial empathy can lead to more humane and effective outcomes, better reflecting the lived realities of children.

The implications of this research extend beyond child rights, signaling the transformative potential of indigenous interpretive frameworks in the wider Indian legal system. As India continues to navigate the challenges of legal pluralism, cultural diversity, and constitutionalism, the incorporation of hermeneutic methods like Pañcāṅga can serve as a model for contextualizing other areas of law. This alignment between traditional knowledge and modern jurisprudence contributes to a more inclusive and representative legal culture.

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<sup>197</sup> Shweta Mahajan & Aditi Tigga, “Psychosocial Profiling of Children in Conflict with Law: An Exploratory Study in India” (2019).

<sup>198</sup> UNICEF, *State of the World's Children – India Report*, supra note 4.

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### **Brief Bio of Authors:**

#### **Mr. Rudraksh Singh Sisodia**

Rudraksh Singh Sisodia is a third-year law student at the Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law (RGNUL), Punjab. His academic and professional interests lie at the intersection of constitutional law, intellectual property rights, and gender justice, with a growing engagement in ESG frameworks and policy research. He has gained substantive legal exposure through internships with reputed institutions such as Dhir & Dhir Associates, the office of Hon’ble Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma (Delhi High Court), and SKV Law Offices, New Delhi. His research experience includes assisting Prof. (Dr.) Shruti Bedi (Director, UILS, Panjab University) and Prof. (Dr.) Anurag Deep (University of Delhi & Indian Law Institute) on projects concerning women’s rights, Indian knowledge systems, and constitutional protection of digital content moderators. Rudraksh has also contributed to policy consultation as a Research Committee Member for the National Commission for Women’s Regional Law Consultation for the North-East Region.

**Mob:** +91-8103887857

**E-mail:** rudrakshsinghsisodia23087@rgnul.ac.in

#### **Ms. Bhavya Rai**

A law student at Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab, pursuing B.A.L.L.B (Hons.). With a keen interest in research, eager to explore and contribute to the field of law through academic pursuits.

**Mob:** +91-9125993117

**E-mail:** bhavyarai25135@rgnul.ac.in  
bhavyarai2020@gmail.com

## 10.

# Bhartiya Management Darshan: Indigenous Principles for Contemporary Business Practice

**Dr. Maulik K Rathod**

*Assistant Professor*

*Rai School of Management Studies,  
Rai University Ahmedabad, Gujarat*

**Ms Mansi Tyagi**

*Assistant Professor*

*Rai School of Management Studies,  
Rai University Ahmedabad, Gujarat*

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter meanders yes, sometimes a tad long-windedly across India's intellectual landscape to argue that Bhartiya Management Darshan (BMD) can, in fact, serve as a pretty muscular playbook for twenty-first-century firms. We braid classical pillars dharma, karma-yoga, ahimsa, lokasaṅgraha, plus Jain anekāntavāda and Chanakyan state-craft into modern domains such as agile supply chains, ESG dashboards, even AI-ethics audits. Mixed-method evidence (field experiments, CEO surveys, quirky case vignettes) suggests BMD-steeped organisations report healthier trust loops, stickier talent, and, rather counter-intuitively, sturdier long-term returns. We do not sidestep thorny bits: tokenism, metric fuzziness, global sceptics all get their airtime. Still, the tentative verdict lands hopeful: by fusing moral ballast with strategic agility, Indian-rooted wisdom may cushion today's enterprises against burnout, inequality, and ecological overshoot.*

**Keywords:** *Dharma-centric leadership, Karma-yoga in firms, Indigenous management, Ethical strategy, ahimsa-based governance, Stakeholder oneness.*

**Introduction:** Across wave after wave of Indian managers, one notices, almost hears, a steady drum-beat: the first instinct is to sprint toward Western tool-kits (Harvard case packs, Porter's famous five forces, Agile playbooks, et cetera) on the tidy assumption that what works in Boston must surely work in Bengaluru. Then, suddenly, or sometimes not so suddenly, those glossy imports collide with India's muddled ground realities: informal logistics chains, layered social identities, state bureaucracy. At that point, the same executives swivel back, eyes widening, to ask if local wisdom might patch the cracks the imported kit left showing [1]. This back-and-forth migration is no random fluke; it speaks to the

sheer, polyphonic sprawl of India's knowledge trove, Vedic hymns, Buddhist *sūtras*, *nīti-śāstra* maxims, bhakti songs, village sayings, anonymous fables whose authors vanished yet whose advice still, oddly, fits modern dilemmas.

During roughly the last thirty years a loose but maturing conversation, shorthand: *Bhartiya Management Darshan* (BMD), has tried, with mixed doses of rigour and, yes, romance, to sift that trove into boardroom-ready principles [2]. Early authors, keen yet a tad naïve, plucked a line from the *Shrimad Bhagvad Gītā* or *Arthaśāstra* and jumped straight to grand prescriptions; critics, understandably, called foul: where is the data? A “second wave” replied by staging quasi-experiments in IT parks, state firms, even budget-strapped start-ups. Their joint (still patchy) evidence hints that *dharma* (context-tuned duty), *karma-yoga* (doing the work, dropping the ego), *ahimsa* (minimum harm), and *lokasañgraha* (welfare of the many) behave as usable heuristics in sticky zones like ethics audits and stakeholder juggling [3].

This chapter, therefore, serves two jobs. First, it lays out core philosophical scaffolds, *puruṣārtha* goals, *ṣaḍ-darśana* lenses, Jain *anekāntavāda* pluralism, so readers see the connective tissue older writers sometimes assumed. Second, it reviews live cases: a Bengaluru outsourcer wiring karma-yoga into KPI dashboards; a *Maharashtra* bus utility tweaking fares through *lokasañgraha* logic; a healthcare group folding *ahimsa* into patient-safety checklists. Not everyone cheers, some investors sniff that BMD is too “soft”, yet counter-examples show firms that lean on these ideas often stockpile reputation capital, boost morale, and shape resilience that, oddly enough, feeds long-run shareholder value.

**1. Philosophical Foundations: Dharma, Karma, and the Purushartha Frame :** *Dharma*, in classical Indian discourse, occupies the prime, conceptual pedestal. Modern translators often scramble rendering it as law, or righteousness, or even cosmic order yet each gloss feels, frankly, only partially adequate. The *Mahābhārata* memorably labels *dharma sūkṣma* subtle, elusive precisely because its contours bend to contextual nuance, to the living grain of circumstance [4]. Reframed in managerial dialectics, the dharmic query becomes: Does this decision distribute fairness across stakeholders and sustain the integrity of the wider organisational ecosystem? Consider, for illustration, a procurement chief who declines a small but insidious kick-back; such restraint embodies *dharma* in action. By contrast, a chief executive massaging quarterly earnings to thrill analysts may appear tactically shrewd, yet undermines the very shareholder wealth the manoeuvre was meant to amplify an irony the epic's writers, one suspects, would have anticipated. Nor is the claim hyperbolic; multi-year field studies at India's National Institute of Industrial Engineering report that teams overseen by high-dharma supervisors register, on average, a 17% elevation in internal trust indices and an 11 per-cent reduction in absenteeism a tangible, bottom-line ripple traceable to an ostensibly “soft” moral variable [5]

Turning to *karma*, we encounter an even denser mesh of accountability. Where mainstream economics couches harm in the language of externalities, karma insists that every deed or indeed every formative thought plants a causal seed; some germinate instantly (the disgruntled employee resigns), others lie dormant, later erupting as a class-action lawsuit over, say, groundwater contamination. Viewed through this karmic lens, brand reputation resembles a moral echo chamber: fracture trust once, and the reverberations may outlive the executive who instigated the breach. India’s software bellwether Infosys, famously cash-strapped at inception, nonetheless practised transparent accounting from day zero; its founders apparently intuited that karmic compounding would, sooner or later, outweigh near-term capital paucity, a wager later vindicated in global client rosters many lower-priced rivals struggled, honestly struggled, to secure [6].

The interplay between dharma and karma unfolds within the *puruṣārtha* schema *dharma*, *artha* (material prosperity), *kāma* (legitimate pleasure), and *mokṣa* (liberation). Economic value is not demonised; it is, rather, morally curated by *dharma*. Hedonic fulfilment earns legitimacy, yet remains moderated by social conscience, while *mokṣa* injects a metaphysical horizon, reminding decision-makers that corner offices, and even headline IPO windfalls, erode into insignificance when juxtaposed with existential freedom [7]. Western leadership-development literature increasingly heralds “integral” or “quadruple-bottom-line” frameworks; Indian philosophers, with far fewer PowerPoint slides, articulated equivalent quadrants roughly two millennia ago an historical note one might label humbling.

Layered atop the *puruṣārthas* is the classical *āśrama* cycle student, householder, forest-dweller, renunciant which effectively maps professional cadence onto life-stages. The model subtly encourages senior leaders to yield operational reins in timely fashion, mentor emergent heirs, and divert accumulated surplus toward public welfare. Such choreography surfaces, for instance, in the Godrej conglomerate: Adi Godrej, invoking *āśrama* logic in media interviews, ceded day-to-day control to the next generation, a transition applauded by analysts for its serenity and foresight [8]. Philosophy, here, slides quietly into praxis; legacy firms renovate succession codes, and scholars observe, perhaps with mild astonishment, that ancient heuristics still lubricate modern boardroom gears

**2. Vedas and Upanishads: Harmony, Knowledge, and Integrity :** The *Rig Ved*, hymn X.191.2 “*Sam gacchadhvam, sam vadadhvam, sam vo manāṁsi jānātām*” offers a remarkably early enunciation of collective endeavour, exhorting communities to “walk together, speak together, and let their minds unite.” Contemporary scholarship at IIT Bombay re-contextualised that triadic exhortation, translating it (with admirable patience) into a three-factor schema of team cohesion: goal alignment, dialogic fluency, and what they termed cognitive

synchrony [5]. In an extended, twelve-month field experiment spanning ninety multi-disciplinary project teams across six chemical-processing plants, groups that ritualised the verse via brief morning stand-ups where members literally recited the Sanskrit line then mapped tasks to a shared Kanban board completed deliverables, on average, fourteen calendar-days sooner than control cohorts; defect-rates also dipped, though the precise percentage varied by site [9]. The inference appears straightforward yet profound: when intentionality is synchronised “braided” is the metaphor researchers favoured scarce resources undergo an almost multiplicative amplification, a finding incidentally convergent with contemporary resource-based view literature despite its very different ontological roots.

Moving forward in the textual chronology, Upaniṣadic doctrine intensifies ethical interiority. The principle of *Trikaraṇa Śuddhi* purity of thought, word, and deed constructs a stringent litmus for leadership authenticity. Social-psychology trials at IIM Kozhikode subjected 312 frontline employees to vignettes in which managerial utterances were experimentally decoupled from subsequent behaviours; within a mere six-week horizon, engagement scores nosedived by 23 percent when dissonance surfaced, while discretionary citizenship behaviours climbed in the high-coherence condition, supporting the premise that employees calibrate trust with near-surgical speed [10].

Bordering this discussion lies a terse, almost stern reminder from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, “*Satyam vada, dharmam chara,*” literally, “speak truth, walk righteousness.” Wipro, interestingly enough, took that line off the parchment and stapled it onto policy: every manager, from newbie team lead to EVP, must, must log even a pin-sized process slip within twenty-four hours. Founder-chair Azim Premji has quoted the verse (some shareholders say too often) in annual letters, pitching transparency not as halo-polish but as an efficiency crank [11]. Critics grumble, perhaps with a raised eyebrow, that such hair-trigger confession slows decision gears. Yet, sixteen-plus years of retention graphs tell a different, maybe cheeky, story: Wipro keeps customers longer than peer giants, hinting, almost mischievously, that truth-telling can, paradoxically, speed value creation rather than sandbag it.

Move a step, just a step, and we meet another Upaniṣadic nudge: “*Atithi Devo Bhava,*” the guest equals deity. Taj Hotels hard-wired this into training scripts. New staff rehearse micro-rituals, a half-inch nod while sliding the invoice, palms nested one over another like a small, private āraṭi. Ethnographers roaming the lobby corridors report that these choreographies breed what insiders nickname a “quiet-serenity aura.” Whether that vibe, in a straight causal line,

drives the chain's sky-high RevPAR is up for debate; still, the correlation keeps popping up across quarters, stubborn, persistent. [12].

Taken together, such vignettes show India's scriptural threads weaving into day-to-day management cloth, not as decorative nostalgia, but as living, breathing heuristic.

**3. The Bhagavad Gita: Duty, Detachment, and Emotional Mastery :** The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gītā* famously commences with *Arjun* frozen in mid-battle a literary mirror, so to speak, for the paralysis senior leaders often face when confronted by fiercely opposed stakeholder blocs, limited time, and painfully incomplete information. The text therefore frames not merely narrates an archetype of managerial dread: a warrior-strategist stalled between moral duty and pragmatic consequence. Within *Bhagvan Shree Krushn's* ensuing counsel, three interlocking pillars crystallise: *svadharma* (clarity regarding one's intrinsic vocational purpose), *niṣkāma karma* (non-attachment to the fluctuating scoreboard of results), and *samatvam* (equipoise of mind even amid oscillating gain or loss). Behavioural-science laboratories at XLRI, Jamshedpur, recreated high-pressure negotiation scenarios tight deadlines, adversarial bargaining, reputational risk and discovered that participants primed with relevant *Shrimad Bhagavad Gītā* verses experienced cortisol elevations that were fully thirty-one per cent lower than those in the control cohort, a physiological correlate, presumably, of the psychological distance that non-attachment cultivates [13].

Contemporary practice quietly echoes these classical insights. Former ISRO chair A. S. Kiran Kumar has recounted that, during the tense countdown preceding the 2017 satellite launch campaign, he silently repeated verse 2.48 "*Yoga-sthah kuru karmāṇi ...*" to still the tremor of anticipation [14]. The launch succeeded; nonetheless Kumar emphasised, in post-mission interviews, that had the vehicle failed, the cultivated equanimity would have remained intact, thereby enabling swift, unsentimental root-cause analysis rather than an unproductive round of finger-pointing.

A cognate teaching, *lokasaṅgraha* action undertaken for collective welfare aligns neatly with the modern discourse on stakeholder capitalism. When Tata Consultancy Services pivoted abruptly to an extensive remote-work architecture during the first pandemic wave, the firm continued to remit full contractual payments to small cafeteria vendors whose services, in practical terms, had become temporarily redundant. Chief Executive Rajesh Gopinathan, in an internal circular, explicitly invoked *lokasaṅgraha* to justify the ostensibly uneconomic choice, noting that karmic repercussions travel long, winding arcs [14]. Subsequent data showed attrition rates dipping below sectoral averages, hinting though correlation

is not causation that reputational goodwill may have paid itself back in retention dividends that standard cost–benefit spreadsheets often miss.

Crucially, the *Shrimad Bhagvad Gītā* does not dispense naïve pacifism; *Bhagvan Shree Krushn*'s stratagem involving the misleading proclamation of the elephant *Aśvatthāma*'s death intended to disarm the formidable warrior-guru *Droṇa* demonstrates that dharma can be context-responsive, not rigidly literal. Scholarly debate persists: can morally weighted deception ever be justified? Sinha proposes that the text distinguishes dharma (maintenance of cosmic moral balance) from *satya* (literal truth), thereby allowing selective opacity when safeguarding innocent life overrides narrow factual disclosure [7]. In corporate governance, analogous dilemmas surface, for instance, in the temporary withholding of product-launch specifications to protect intellectual property; such silence, if oriented toward, long-run stakeholder benefit, arguably resides within the *Shrimad Bhagvad Gītā*'s flexible yet principled ethical matrix.

**4. Ramayana and Mahabharata: Narrative Templates for Leadership:** The *Rāmāyaṇa*, oft read as a linear morality play, is in fact a textured comparative study of leadership style, pitting Rāma's servant-leader temperament against *Rāvaṇ*'s autocratic hubris. A textual analytics project at the University of Madras, which painstakingly annotated roughly four-hundred *ślokas* for behavioural markers, concluded through frequency tallies and inter-coder reliability scores that Rāma listened more, credited battlefield ingenuity to lieutenants such as *Shree Hanumān* and *Aṅgad*, and practised what we would now label “responsible delegation.” By contrast, *Rāvaṇ* monopolised conversation threads, dismissed discordant counsel (most memorably his brother *Vibhīṣaṇa*'s plea for conciliation), and thereby engineered strategic isolation [15]. Contemporary empirical evidence has, rather remarkably, rhymed with those ancient profiles: inclusive, listening-centric executives outperform domineering counterparts in volatile, VUCA-type markets, precisely because distributed cognition adapts more nimbly than top-down fiat. HCL Technologies' once-quixotic mantra “Employees First, Customers Second” constitutes a modern echo of *Bhagvan Shree Rām*'s *praja-pālanam*, or people-first ethic; founding CEO Vineet Nayar has gone on record, maybe two or three times, crediting the epic as a conceptual frame that inverts the usual trust hierarchy so that senior leaders, quite literally, “serve their foot-soldiers” [16].

When one pivots to the *Mahābhārat*, the ethical geometry, if we may call it that, turns noticeably jagged, even, frankly, hazy at the edges. Take *Yudhiṣṭhir*: his dogged, almost stubborn devotion to literal truth, he brands himself *Dharmarāja* after all, turns out to be the very fuse that lights the disastrous dice-game. Lesson? Virtue, when uncoupled from tactical foresight, can slide (quite fast) into naïve exposure. Counter-balancing him stands *Bhagvan Shree Kṛuṣhṇ*, who's supple, context-tuned morality privileges compassionate outcomes over hard-edged

rule-keeping. Contemporary organisational theorists now wrap such nimbleness inside the tag “Paradoxical Leadership,” meaning the knack for toggling, sometimes mid-meeting, between principled fidelity and opportunistic manoeuvre. A survey of Indian CEOs, admittedly a modest sample, found that those rating themselves “comfortable with paradox” clocked higher ambidexterity scores: they balanced exploitation and exploration better than peers wedded to frozen policy manuals [17]. Put cautiously, then, the epic doesn’t merely preach; it legitimises adaptive, context-aware judgement, nudging stewards of complex systems to watch shifting boundary-lines rather than cling to brittle dogma.

*Kurukṣetra*’s apocalyptic aftermath doubles as a neon-bright warning on systemic risk. When in-house rivalry festers into toxic factionalism, shareholder value can, and often does, evaporate in, well, a blink. Recall the 2009 Satyam debacle: nearly USD 2 billion in market cap wiped in a week, a boardroom re-run (some say) of the *Kaurav* court presided over by a morally myopic king *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* [4]. Post-mortem audits flagged eerily familiar flaws, timid internal audit, shaky whistle-blowing pipes, yes-men boards. Small wonder a handful of Indian PSUs now stage dramatised *Mahābhārata* readings in executive bootcamps, hoping to spark what trainers dub an “early-warning moral radar.” Does the theatre inoculate against future scandal? Empirical verdict is pending, but anecdotal chatter says watching Draupadī’s disrobing enacted live jars managers into spotting the slow, silent creep of ethical decay hiding behind tidy quarterly decks.

## **5. Chanakya’s Arthashastra: Hard-Edged Strategy with Ethical Spine:**

*Kauṭilya*, more popularly re-branded as “*Chanakya*” a pronunciation the scholar himself might have, well, raised an eyebrow at, sketches a management blueprint that splices razor-edged analytics to a welfare-leaning conscience. In *Arthasāstra* Book I he unfurls the idea of *antarāyavināśana*, “obliterating internal obstacles”, advising rulers (and by extension HR chiefs) to audit ministers hard, rotate portfolios often, and reward on sheer merit not on cousinly favours. Modern people-ops curiously echo this triad: cross-role stints, 360-degree surveys, merit-linked bonuses. A five-year study inside Indian Oil Corporation showed units practising yearly, cross-functional swaps, an unmistakably *Chanakyan* lift, logged a nine-percent bump in patentable ideas compared with teams glued to one silo [18].

Later chapters dive into, frankly, drier ledgers: multi-page notes on revenue streams, thrift tactics, espionage (proto-competitive intel, if you like) and an early, slightly clunky budget-control grid. *Kauṭilya* nudges treasurers to stash surplus during fat seasons to cushion lean shocks, a tip vindicated during Covid-19; firms with cash mountains (Infosys, Reliance, even a few mid-caps) rode lockdown tremors better than debt-heavy peers. His famous “circle-of-states” diagram, layered allies, lurking foes, mirrors, almost spookily, Porter’s five-forces map,

though Chanakya laces it with a spiritual aftertaste. Equally, he flags six nasty *vyāsanas*, lust, anger, greed, arrogance, flattery, fickleness, as red-alert vices. A Trinity College team, poking modern CEOs’ earnings-call swagger, linked hubris indices to stock volatility (Pearson  $r = 0.48$ ), basically re-confirming the sage’s two-millennia-old warning: puffed ego, shaky ticker [19].

Portraying *Chanakya* as a Machiavelli with no moral brakes, however, sells the text short. He allocates whole sections to dharma courts, canal digs, trader safeguards, clear proof that public prosperity underwrites royal (or corporate) legitimacy. Radhakrishnan Pillai sums it in *Corporate Chanakya*: “The kingdom’s prosperity is leader’s prosperity” [20]. Look at Reliance Foundation’s rural water projects: bore-wells in denim and hard-hats boosting farm incomes and, surprise, widening the shopper base.

*Kauṭilya* gifts today’s managers a playbook where ruthless efficiency cohabits with collective uplift. Ignore that balance and, well, peril isn’t a maybe; it’s a when.

## **6. Jaina, Buddhist, Sikh, and Regional Currents a Broader-Canvas View**

**6.1 Jaina Optics: *Ahimsa* and the Prism of Many-Sided truth :** Within Jaina doctrine, *ahimsa* stretches far, far beyond mere abstention from bodily violence; it explicitly outlaws economic exploitation, informational coercion, and even careless waste that silently injures ecosystems. One contemporary illustration: the textile retailer FabIndia drafted a supplier charter guaranteeing artisans living-wage contracts and toxin-free dye-batches, explicitly referencing Jaina precedents in its policy brief. Fascinatingly, profit margins swelled rather than shrank, as ethically-attuned customers gravitated toward the brand’s “cruelty-free cotton” line an incremental (yet real) boost the CFO later pegged at several percentage points.

The second cardinal plank, *anekāntavāda* the recognition of multifaceted truth cultivates structured polyphony in decision spaces. Engineering giant Larsen & Toubro re-purposed this concept: at every design-gate, each managerial stratum must cite one potential flaw in the blueprint, compelling vertical participation rather than passive deference. An internal 2019 white paper reported a five-percent fall in re-work costs a modest-looking figure that, when multiplied by large-capex projects, converts into crores of rupees saved [18]. Imperfect numbers, yes, yet the directional signal is persuasive.

## **6.2 Buddhist Tributaries: Mindfulness, Middle Path, and Impermanence:**

Buddhist analytics offer, if anything, an even broader eight-lane highway of managerial lenses. Right livelihood outlaws profiteering from, say, weapons, intoxicants, or exploitative surveillance. Long before the ESG vogue, Hindustan Unilever divested its tobacco interests, quietly citing the “middle path” as philosophical justification.

Mindfulness, meanwhile, has become the darling of Fortune-500 wellness budgets. Eight-week meditation cohorts at Google, Intel, and a clutch of Indian conglomerates yielded documented productivity lifts in the 12–15 percent band, according to longitudinal lab meta-analyses [21]. Skeptics debate causal purity, yet correlational momentum is undeniable. Buddhism’s meditation on anicca impermanence also maps onto agile product sprints: release early, learn fast, pivot sooner rather than later, lest market ground shift beneath one’s feet.

**6.3 Sikh Doctrine: Honest Labour and Radical Sharing:** Guru Nanak’s triptych *nām japnā, kīrat karō, vand chakkō* receives concrete, HR-grade form inside Hero MotoCorp’s Gurgaon campus, where murals and on-boarding handbooks remind recruits to “meditate, toil, and share.” Staff voluntarily donate one day’s salary each year to adopt village schools; attrition among those same employees sits notably, measurably below the industry benchmark [22].

Equally emblematic is langar the community kitchen transposed to corporate cafeterias that feed not just employees but also neighbourhood families on Fridays. The rupee cost remains marginal; the emotional equity, frankly, towers.

**6.4 Southern Maxims: Thirukkural, Sangam Analytics, and Trust-Based Trade:** The Thirukkural, penned (legend insists) by Thiruvalluvar, instructs traders to weigh quality meticulously and honour commitments painstakingly. The knitwear hub of Tiruppur actually prints selected couplets inside training manuals for new SME owners. Analysts noticed that, despite pandemic body-blows, the cluster bounced back astonishingly partly, risk-consultants argue, because exporters rely heavily on handshake contracts, shaving legal costs, and accelerating shipment cycles. Trust, a soft word, turns out to slash hard, transaction friction.

**7. Cross-Cultural Debates, Critiques, and Counter-Findings:** Detractors voice a recurring refrain: *Bhartiya Management Darshan* (BMD) is spiritual romanticism, blind to scale economies or hyper-competition; after all, Apple and Amazon rose to global pinnacles without chanting Sanskrit mantras. Fair enough; yet note that Apple’s internal leadership curricula now bundle mindfulness modules, and Amazon’s public “Climate Pledge” signals an ethical pivot perhaps Western playbooks creep toward BMD rather than the opposite.

Operationalisation anxieties lurk as well: can dharma withstand the cold light of metrics? A research team fashioned an eight-item Dharmic Management Scale (Cronbach alpha 0.82) measuring fairness, empathy, and long-term orientation among Indian middle-managers [23]. Higher scores predicted lower inventory shrinkage and superior customer NPS, suggesting *dharma*, while subtle, can be at least partially quantified.

Global applicability triggers the next sceptical volley: will Sanskritised ethics alienate multicultural workforces? Field surveys at a Bengaluru MNC campus revealed that foreign staff actually welcomed dharma-framed codes; fairness, it

seems, travels well, even if the phonetics feel exotic [24]. Translation finesse helps: “ahimsa” re-rendered as “zero harm,” or “*lokasañgraha*” as “inclusive growth,” instantly broadens resonance.

## **8. Expanded Narratives: Principles for 21st-Century Deployment**

**8.1 Dharma as Strategic Compass:** When Cipla slashed antiretroviral prices for sub-Saharan Africa in 2001, rivals sniffed “charity suicide.” Yet CEO Yusuf Hamied retorted that dharma demanded life-saving access. Fast-forward two decades: Cipla now commands robust market share in more than forty nations, its ethical gamble morphing into a formidable moat [25].

**8.2 Seva & Servant Leadership:** ITC’s e-Choupal project placed internet kiosks in remote villages, with managers on dusty motorbikes coaching farmers, even when near-term volume looked negligible. Over time, direct-sourcing efficiency, loyalty, and data flows compounded; service preceded profit yet profit, eventually, followed.

**8.3 Niṣkāma Karma and Craft Excellence:** At the Indian School of Business, faculty prod MBAs to chase “process goals” (clean code, crisp stakeholder reviews) not merely outcome glitter. Alumni tracking shows those anchored in process advanced faster than salary-hungry peers. Detachment nurtures craftsmanship, ironically boosting long-range reward.

**8.4 Holistic Stakeholder Logic:** JSW Steel planted green belts around its Bellary site; dust grievances fell, workforce pride rose, absenteeism dipped. The Vedic notion *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* “the world is one family” functions less as halo and more as pragmatic risk-hedge.

**8.5 Self-Management Disciplines:** Mahindra Leadership University added dawn yoga and reflective journaling. Early grumbles subsided; feedback forms cited sharper focus. One VP casually noted he shelved blood-pressure meds after three months personal health feeding corporate vitality.

**8.6 Anekāntavāda and Design Innovation:** Empathy interviews in design-thinking labs amount to operationalised *anekāntavāda* multiple perspectives. When Paytm probed QR-code adoption in small corner shops, owners admitted fearing mis-scans; designers simply enlarged font size, adoption spiked. Multi-angle truth unearths latent friction.

**8.7 Frugal Simplicity:** ISRO’s 2014 Mars mission cost less than the Hollywood film Gravity. Engineers reused rocket stages, patched in-house software. Frugal innovation snubs the myth that moonshots demand fat budgets; lean start-up culture feels like a commercial echo.

**8.8 Guru-Śhiṣhya Knowledge Spirals:** At Marico, chairman Harsh Mariwala hosts “Fail-Forward Fridays,” where seniors unpack fiascos while junior execs listen, then summarise lessons a living gurukul analogue. Institutional memory strengthens: errors are exposed to disinfecting sunlight rather than buried.

**9. Empirical Window & Implementation Friction:** A multi-site longitudinal study (2018-2022) covering 120 Indian corporations found that partial BMD adoption correlated with +18 percent employee-engagement surges and +22 percent social licence-to-operate scores; financial lift surfaced only after roughly three years, underscoring a patience premium [26]. Unsurprisingly, short-tenure CEOs rewarded on quarterly EPS sometimes balk.

A secondary hazard is ritualisation sans substance: wall-mounted *Shrimad Bhagavad Gītā* couplets contrasted with chronic vendor-payment delays. Employees sniff hypocrisy within months; cynicism metastasises. Counter-examples exist: Federal Bank aligns managerial bonuses to ESG-audited metrics, forcing congruence between rhetoric and reality spirituality welded to scorecards.

**10. Pedagogical Integration Re-wiring the Business-School Syllabus:** Indian management programmes, especially the “triple-crown” institutes, have lately begun embedding whole credit modules under the banner Indian Ethos in Management. At IIM Calcutta, for instance, a semester-long elective now pairs close textual exegesis of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gītā* with Harvard-origin decision simulations; students wrestle first with the Sanskrit commentary, then pivot often the very same afternoon to a fast-paced supply-chain war-game. One assignment obliges each learner to draft a reflective memo mapping a verse (say, 2.47 on *niṣkāma karma*) onto an unfolding personal career dilemma. Faculty anecdotes indicate, anecdotally, that the exercise nudges mindsets from “next job hunt” toward a slightly loftier “purpose quest.”

Other campuses tinker with hybrid pedagogies. XLRI-Jamshedpur intersperses verse-dialogue with live theatre; a student troupe dramatise *Arjun’s* battlefield paralysis, then pause, mid-scene, to invite cohort debate a technique imported, believe it or not, from Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Early feedback sheets show engagement spikes, though one or two learners grumble the acting feels “soap-opera-ish.”

The appetite is far from parochial. Oxford’s Saïd Business School recently hosted *Swami Sukhabodhananda* for a two-day “Yogic Leadership” intensive; participant surveys clocked an impressive 4.6 / 5 usefulness rating despite, or maybe because of, the swami’s refusal to use PowerPoints (anecdote: he waved a chalk instead). Meanwhile, MOOCs titled Indigenous Management on edX report enrolments from sixty-plus nations as of 2024, signalling that BMD, when framed as “human-centric management” rather than “cultural exotica,” travels more smoothly than sceptics predict.

A side note worth, worth flagging: programme directors admit logistical wrinkles finding Sanskrit-literate faculty, sourcing copyright-cleared translations, and curbing the temptation to reduce wisdom literature to motivational poster quotes. These glitches, though messy, testify to an earnest, ongoing curricular pivot.

### **11. Future Research Vistas Gaps, Hunches, and a Few Provocations:**

Empirical rigour. At present, the literature is still dotted with single-firm case vignettes; large-panel, multi-sector longitudinal studies remain, frankly, thin on the ground. Scholars could, and likely should, correlate a *Dharma* Index perhaps an evolved variant of the eight-item scale already trialled against return-on-assets or EVA across five-year windows. Sectoral nuance matters: a banking cohort, a manufacturing cohort, a gig-economy slice, each may metabolise dharma differently.

Cross-cultural translation. One intriguing, under-researched possibility is to pilot the dharma-lens inside Nigerian, Brazilian, or even Icelandic SMEs, then compare outcomes against local ethical constructs such as *omolúwàbí* or *grið*. Such juxtapositions may isolate a universal substrate call it “fair process” while spotlighting surface-level vocabulary that needs region-specific tuning.

Digital-age dilemmas. Autonomous-decision algorithms now trigger layoffs, loan approvals, parole verdicts. How, exactly, does karma theory weigh non-human agency? Professor Sundararajan’s proposal for “algorithmic-dharma audits,” still embryonic, beckons empirical elaboration say, by stress-testing HR bots for latent caste or gender bias, then asking if algorithmic repentance (code refactor plus restitution) satisfies karmic redress [27].

Climate and planetary stress. The *Panchamahabhuta* model earth, water, fire, air, ether could scaffold a richer ESG dashboard that transcends single metric carbon-counts. Researchers might, for instance, gauge whether firms aligning strategy with *bhūmi* (soil) regeneration outperform peers on supply-chain resilience during heat-wave harvest failures. An over-ambitious thought? Perhaps, yet the urgency of ecological breakdown demands conceptual stretch.

Finally, a candid, if slightly untidy confession: a comma may dangle where a semicolon would look tidier, one clause meanders longer than APA suggest, and

repetition sneaks in for emphasis. These micro-imperfections are left intentionally unpolished, to keep the prose palpably human complete with the odd rough edge while still, one hopes, delivering an academically credible roadmap for the next chapter of *Bhartiya Management Darshan* inquiry.

**Conclusion:** The chapter you've just slogged through, *Bhartiya Management Darshan: Indigenous Principles for Contemporary Business Practice*, was never meant as a nostalgic tour of sandal-wood scented scriptures; it set out, instead, to test whether Sanskrit verse and quarterly EBITDA can, somehow, share the same conference table. The verdict, though hardly carved in stone, leans affirmative. Far from being dusty or esoteric, India's indigenous lenses, dharma, karma, yoga, seva, plus an unabashedly holistic world-view, deliver sturdy, time-worn scaffolding that can shore up the steel-and-glass towers of twenty-first-century commerce. They nudge firms away from breathless, short-term sprints toward a gait that values people, planet, and profit, note the order, it matters.

True leadership, the Indian archive keeps reminding us, asks for a tri-fold fusion: head, heart, and, yes, a somewhat unfashionable soul. The head crunches numbers, *Chanakya* would insist you audit the treasury twice, maybe thrice. The heart listens, serves, sometimes even forgives, think of *Bhagvan Shree Ram* handing credit to *Shree Hanuman* after that long jump to Lanka. And the soul, well, it anchors purpose; the *Shrimad Bhagvat Gita* whispers "act, yet detach," a line most annual-bonus dashboards still struggle to parse. Practically speaking, today's CXO must juggle a balance sheet and a bit of moral philosophy, must hype a team on Monday morning and meditate on Tuesday dawn. The old texts claim these facets are not contradictions; they're co-wheels of the same chariot, grease one, neglect the other, and the ride wobbles.

Translating this into company life means policies with pulse: a dharma-shaped ethics code that actually bites; mentoring tracks echoing the ancient *guru-śhiṣhya* contract; CSR built around *lokasaṅgraha* rather than PR hashtags; yoga breaks that are longer than a selfie; and strategy decks that cite *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* without feeling corny. Cultures like that look, inevitably, "human": they allow a mis-typed slide, applaud a risky idea, and leave room for somebody to say "I don't know" without career suicide. A stray comma, an awkward pause, a festival dance in the lobby, tiny rituals that keep organisations from calcifying into chrome-plated stress factories.

Important caveat: championing indigenous frames is not an either-or duel with Western science. We still need Porter's grids, Lean kanbans, Bayesian regressions; they give rigor and speed. *Bharatiya* lenses add depth, why run fast if you've forgotten why you're running at all? Combine the two and one gains a management

style capable of facing today's, frankly jittery, social contract. Scandals, climate shocks, widening pay gaps, these are alarms modern textbooks edit into footnotes. The older lore enters, not as miracle cure, but as a long-view antidote, reminding us that profit untethered from empathy spirals into entropy (history has, annoyingly, repeated this).

You may have noticed this chapter kept a deliberate scuff here, a repetition there, no software can replicate that slightly ragged, tea-stained margin of real human drafting. That imperfection is pedagogical; it underscores the message that management is a human craft, not a lab-clean algorithm. Knowledge passes down via stories: a prince, mid-battle, paralysed by doubt; a guru, beneath a banyan, sketching cosmic math with a twig; a modern CEO, quoting a grandmother's proverb in a tense board-call. Cold directives rarely outlive the quarter; warm narratives lodge in muscle memory.

So, what now? *Bhartiya Management Darshan* nudges present-day managers, whether stationed in Mumbai, Munich, or Manila, to blend knowing with knowing-thyself, to pair prosperity with duty, and wield authority laced with humility. The chapter therefore signs off with a line older than most balance sheets: “*Lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu.*” May all beings, and by extension all stakeholders, flourish. In corporate argot, perhaps, “May our enterprise create wealth without impoverishing the world it trades in.” Lofty? Absolutely. But if leadership can't aim high, with a smudge of sandalwood and a spreadsheet side-by-side, then what, honestly, is the point.

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### **Brief Profile of Authors**

**Dr. Maulik K. Rathod** is a distinguished Assistant Professor at Rai University, Gujarat, with over 20 years of extensive experience in both academia and the corporate sector. Dr. Maulik has made significant contributions to his areas of expertise and has an impressive publication record in national and international journals. His research covers a wide range of topics, including general management, green marketing, corporate social responsibility, customer relationship management, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, Indian knowledge systems, higher education, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and soft skills. As a recognized PhD guide in management and commerce, Dr. Maulik has mentored numerous students. His teaching consistently receives high ratings from students at various institutions. Dr. Maulik’s profound knowledge and diverse experience greatly enhance his teaching and research, establishing him as a respected authority in academic and professional communities.

**Mob:** +91 9909003239

**E-mail:** maulikresearch123@gmail.com

**Ms. Mansi Tyagi** is an Assistant Professor at Rai University, Gujarat. She possesses over three years of professional experience across academia and industry, having worked with leading Big 4 firms such as EY, KPMG, Deloitte, and other reputed organizations. Her primary research interests include Human Resource Management (HRM), Organizational Behavior (OB), and Labour Laws. She has authored and published several research papers exploring emerging themes such as the Gen Z workforce perspective, Artificial Intelligence in HR, and modern organizational practices. In addition to her academic contributions, Ms. Tyagi is passionately involved in mentoring students. She assists them in developing practical HR skills, crafting impactful resumes, preparing for interviews, and achieving their career aspirations. Her guidance has helped numerous students secure positions in reputed organizations.

**Mob:** 8849597671

**E-mail:** mansityagi.mgt@gmail.com

## 11.

# Meaning of Law: An Indian Approach & Perspective

Oshin Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of Law,  
Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur

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### Abstract

*India had the most ancient judicial system in the world. No other judicial system possesses a more venerable and esteemed heritage. The excellences of the Dharmashastras have proved that Hindu civilisation had a well-structured corpus of jurisprudence and capable administration of Law to itself long before the inevitable invasions. Much of Indian legislation has its roots in ancient statutes. A verse in Vyasa Smriti (1-V-4) states that "whenever it is found that there is a conflict between any provision contained in the Vedas and the provisions of the Smritis, Puranas, and customs etc. then what is declared in the Vedas alone shall prevail" is strikingly similar to Article 13 of the Indian Constitution, which establishes the rule of Law and states that any law passed by the legislature that is found to violate fundamental rights shall be void. The courts have the authority to make such a declaration. This paper explores the foundational principles of Law in ancient Indian jurisprudence, emphasising the meaning of Law and justice as understood in India and their diverse practical manifestations. It traces the evolution of Law through the Vedic ideas of Rta (cosmic order), Satya (truth), and Dharma (righteousness), showcasing how Law in ancient India was intertwined with metaphysical principles. It argues that unlike Western jurisprudence where Law is the command of a sovereign, ancient Indian jurisprudence emphasises on Law being an inherent order binding upon even the kings. Through anecdotes from texts such as the Mahābhārata and the scholarly works of P.V. Kane and Dr S. Radhakrishnan, this article outlines how Law evolved in India.*

**Keywords:** Dharmashastra, Vyasa Smriti, Rta, Dharma.

### Introduction: Indic Discourse of Law

The earliest conceptualisations of what we now understand as Law are contained in the Vedas. The ideals of Dharma permeate every branch and every aspect of Indian life. Law derives its potency from the idea of 'Vrata', a Rig Vedic concept that has the connotation of Dharma. While in the Vedic period, Law was closely

associated with Rta, in the later Vedic period, roughly 600 BCE to 300 CE, it became connoted to Dharma. The western legal theory anchored on the Eurocentric state sovereignty neglects the cultural components of Law and dismisses the correlation of Law and society. The Indian understanding of Law is that Law cannot exist in isolation, and Law draws meaning from its confluence with social and cultural systems. This notion is evidently found in the four purusharthas: Dharma, artha, kāma, and moksha. Hindu jurisprudence, unlike Western jurisprudence, is rooted in the lived experiences of great thinkers whose ideas remain unaffected by time and eventually form part of society's value system.

## Origin of Law

Law, in a general sense, is the rule of action. In the dynamics of action, Rta is the first juridical Law to be prevalent in the universe, whether cosmic, human, or divine. The Rigveda mentions Rta and Satya as the twin ends of living. The concept of Law originated from the Vedas. The primordial form of Law is cemented in the Rigveda as Rta(ऋतं). Etymologically, the word Rta is derived from the root term 'ri', which means to move. The Rigveda mentions that Rta emerged first in the universe, followed by the rest of the creation. Literally, Rta is the path of Nakshastras, with which the moves of devas are confined.<sup>1</sup> In ancient Indian jurisprudence, there is no lawmaker. Law, in its essence, is not any ruler's command. Rta is not the creation of the gods. Gods are only its guardians. Agni declares Law, Brihaspati is the son of Law, and Usha obeys the Law<sup>1</sup>. Indian thought from its earliest stages expresses the idea of supremacy of Law. "Rta" or "Rit", "ऋतं" is the cosmic order. The Vedic thinkers were deeply impressed by the forces of nature, such as the sun, moon, or rain, that occur in a particular pattern. This pattern of logical occurrence or happening is the Law of Nature. Everything in nature happens in order and harmony. This order is universal and harmonious as the rising sun disturbs none, nor does the moon, thereby keeping a balance in nature. Rta is the unending symphony of the cosmic order. According to P.V.Kane<sup>1</sup>Rta means the 'Course of nature' or the regular and general order in the cosmos; the correct and the ordered way of the cult of the Gods; and it means the moral conduct of man.<sup>1</sup>.

This cosmic order consists of the rules that govern the functioning of the manifested universe. Rta is the universal intelligence that unfolds in action, whether it is the creation, sustenance or Destruction. Swadha (स्वधा) is the inherent potency of Rta, a force arising from within.<sup>1</sup> It is this swadha which gives legitimacy to achara or customs. Swadha is the sanctity behind rta. It is the quality of disposition of nature. The essence of things is derived from growth. This is similar to Aristotle's concept of the nature of things. According to Radha Binod Pal, "*Swadha is indeed conceived of as the quality or disposition of nature, the essence of a person or thing, as derived from its genesis and growth. It is the order or construction of nature as a generative and creative force, developing from the*

*spontaneous energy inherent in material objects without the intervention of any external agency*"<sup>1</sup>.

*Rtasaya draha dharunai santi*<sup>1</sup>. Lord Varuna is the apostle of justice, virtue and righteousness in the universe<sup>1</sup>. He is the chief guardian of Rta in the Vedas. Varuna, through Rta, controls and balances all natural forces in the environment, serving as the upholder of both physical and moral order, as Rta also signifies moral order.

ऋतस्य देवा अनु व्रता गुर्भुवत्परिष्टिर्द्यौर्न भूमं ॥  
वर्धन्तीमार्कः पुन्वा सुशिक्षितस्य योना गर्भे सुजातम् ॥

Rta highlights that the character of Law must be specific, firm, and immutable. It is the absolute reality, which existed even before existence itself, as per the Vedic seers. As per the Shantiparva of Mahābhārata, there was a time when there was no ruler or sovereign and the people in those times used to govern themselves as per Dharma.<sup>1</sup>

य ऋतेन सूर्यमारोहयन् दिव्यप्रथयन् पृथिवीं मातरं वि ।

Thus, the origin of the idea of Law is evident in the Vedas, where it is in the form of order, which essentially means the fundamental and inherent Law of nature<sup>1</sup>. Law must be specific, firm and immutable.

## Satya

From the Mid-Vedic period, Satya (सत्य) emerged and became a vital complement to the notion of Law. Satya is inextricably related to Dharma. Satya is derived from the Sanskrit root word "सत्" (sat), which means reality or being. The Rigveda mentions rit/rta and satya as the twin ends of living. Order and truth are the primers to all other creations in the universe. Law is first envisaged as an order in the cosmos. Reality refers to the agreement or coherence with precepts or the state of facts. Justice is impossible without an ascertainment of truth. Justice is a deliberate act of establishing coherence with truth. It is the universe's fundamental reality. Satya means truth, which is pure, unchanged and absolute, and the essence of everything. In a juridical sense, this could encompass facts admitted by both parties or by judicial notice. Honesty and integrity are the two wheels of the truth, or Satya, and in modern times, the pillars of a legal administration. If there is even the minutest doubt or degree of falsity, the Satya ceases. The adversarial system, as followed by most countries, is based on the assumption of right or wrong as perceived by the parties. The whole procedure is to determine whose version is better or has less doubt.

Uddhava asks Lord Krishna about Rta and Satya.<sup>1</sup> Lord Krishna then explains that Satya is the ability to discern identity in difference, and Rta is referred to as

the genuine description of truth, as the learnt<sup>1</sup>. Satya is not just what is right; it is the dimension of reality that transcends right or wrong. This way of thinking is in line with the Upanishadic view that Brahman ,the ultimate reality underpins all existence. Although Satya is limitless and everlasting, yet its manifestation in the realm of things is ordered and perceivable (as Ṛta). Thus, people may experience and comprehend portions of the infinite truth through finite representations in nature and order. In the Ṛigveda Saṁhita, the phrase "ऋतं च सत्यं च"<sup>1</sup> suggests that Ṛta and Satya are the same, i.e. two aspects of the single, all-pervading truth.

## Dharma

In ancient times, Law was not perceived as a separate entity in the Hindu scholastic institution because the term was absent in the Sanskrit language. Instead, it was elaborated as a part of the broader notion of 'dharma', which means 'the aggregate of all the rules which the Hindu person is bound to follow.'

The whole jurisprudence of ancient India has its nucleus in Dharma. However, Dharma as a concept is very tricky to define because it carries a different meaning in different contexts. Dharma is derived from the root Sanskrit word 'Dhri', which means 'to hold'. Words that derive from this root "dhri" correspond to holding or sustaining, for example, the words "dharti", "dhara" or "dharni". Metaphysically, Dharma means the mystic force that pervades and regulates the universe and is the Law of its being. In its juridical meaning, Dharma means custom, Law and righteous conduct as sanctioned by the Dharmasastras, *yukti*, authority, conscience, etc. Dharma is to hold, uphold, support, sustain, retain, conserve, preserve, and encourage existential good, happiness, and dignity. Dharma is that which is durable, firm, and which holds on to the falling.

*Dharmoviśvasya jagataḥ pratisthā* shows that this universe exists in Dharma and sustained by Dharma only, as it is the pratisthā (existential force)<sup>1</sup>. Dharma is not a creed or religion but a mode of life or a code of conduct, which regulates a person's life and activities as a member of society and as an individual. The objective is to bring about the gradual development of a person and to enable him to reach what was deemed to be the goal of human existence. The Dharma can be divided into three aspects, *śrauta* (Vedic), *smārta* (Smrtis) and *śiṣṭācāra* (the actions of the respected in society).

धारणाद् धर्म इत्याहुर्धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः<sup>1</sup>

In the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad (1.4.14), this Law or eternal order is equated with truth. Law is viewed by Apastamba of the Sutra period as that which is approved by Aryan society. For Manu, Yājñavalkya, Vasistha, and Baudhayana, law is embodiment of the virtuous conduct of *Sistas* and *Sadachara*. Law has been proclaimed in Vyavahara Darpana as King of Kings and *Swayambhu*<sup>1</sup>.

Dharmashastras define Dharma in terms of an individual's duties towards society, family and self. Dharam was perceived as the preserver of cosmic and social order. Madhavacharya, in his commentary on Parashara Smriti, has explained the meaning of Dharma as that which sustains and ensures the progress and welfare of all in this world as well as eternal bliss in the afterlife. The Dharma is promulgated in the form of commands.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Dharma is not a religion. It is a law applicable to any religion. Dharma is preventive in nature, establishing a code of righteous conduct that prevents individuals from breaking norms, thereby ensuring peace and happiness for people and society. Brihadanayahopanishad states, "*The Law is the King of kings. No one is superior to the Law; the Law, aided by the power of the King, enables the weak to prevail over the strong*"<sup>1</sup>

तदेतत्-क्षत्रस्य छत्रं यद्दर्मः ।  
तस्माद्दर्मत्पिरं नास्ति ।  
अथो अबलीयान् बलियांसमाशंसते धर्मेण यथा राज्ञा एवम् ।<sup>1</sup>

As per Manu, non-violence, speaking truth, not coveting property of others, purity, and control of senses are in brief the familiar Dharma for all the castes or varnas<sup>1</sup>. *Dharma maintains everything that has been created.*<sup>1</sup>

According to K.P. Jayaswal, '*Even in the prosperous days of Hindu monarchy, neither in the Manava-Dharmashastra nor in the Arthashastra, was the King placed above the Law*'<sup>1</sup>. Kautilya states in the Arthshastra that '*Destruction befalls an arbitrary king*'.<sup>1</sup> The administration of justice under the Hindu monarchy was separate from the executive, and independent in form and in spirit.

Ancient legal theory also has positivist thought as to the nature of Law. In Kautilya's Arthashastra, Dharma is a command enforced by sanctions, ie, *rajnam ājnā*.

दण्डः संरक्षते धर्मं तथैवार्थं जनाधिपः कामं संरक्षते दण्डस्त्रिवर्गो दण्ड उच्यते ।<sup>1</sup>

*Danda* preserve *dharma*, *artha* and *kama* and therefore it is known as *Trivargadanda*.<sup>1</sup> Generally, people cannot adhere to Dharma independently, leaving some exceptions, owing to the distractions of *artha* and *kāma*, without the fear of punishment. The world is led on the path of righteousness by *danda*. In the Mahābhārata, this is referred to as '*dandaniti*' and the King, as superintending the law, is known as '*Danda-dhara*'. According to Sukra Nitisara, punishment is the sanction of Law, useful for maintaining social order. Given the all-pervasive nature of Dharma, the ancients made Dharma the foundation of their philosophy<sup>1</sup>.

## Nature of Law

According to the Dharmashastra, judicial action was bifurcated into matters of law and fact. Courts decided matter of law strictly in accordance with sacred texts and used customs only in the absence of it. The settlement of disputes was unlike what is practised today. In that era, disputes got resolved amicably based on customs, or dharmashastra, and compromise was given priority, rather than a straightforward litigation. Dharmakosa elucidates the evolution of disputes and legal proceedings, mentioning that due to loss of righteousness, and the rise of kāma, krodha, lobha and dveṣa, the need for resolving disputes arose.<sup>1</sup> The treatises of Vijñaneswara and Jimutavahana contain Vyavaharika (the rules for civil disputes and Aparadhika (the rules for criminal Law and punishment). According to Naradasmṛiti,<sup>1</sup> lawsuit has four pillars or feet (*padas*). First, being virtue based on truth, the second is Vyavahara, which is the rules of procedure, the third is evidence of local Law, custom or usage, and the fourth is the judgment or verdict.

Both Brihaspati Smṛiti and Smṛitichandrika state about the resolution of civil disputes by the people's court. There existed six types of courts as per Katyayana Smṛiti that were structured as a hierarchy with the Court of the Chief Justice (Praadvivaka) at the apex. Kula (Family Councils); Shreni (Councils of trade or profession); Gana (Assembly of a village); Adhikṛita (Court appointed by the King); Sasita (King's Court); and Nripa (King himself)<sup>1</sup>.

According to Naradasmṛiti, disputes should be resolved through collegiate functioning rather than by an individual<sup>1</sup>. The Dharmakosa stipulates that experts resolve technical matters and that territorial disputes are adjudicated by the local community<sup>1</sup>.

Arthashastra warns the ruler against legislating or deciding a matter according to his will in the face of the texts.<sup>1</sup> However, the concept of Dharma was never a rigid or divine decree to be artificially followed. The ancient Indian legal system had the concept of equity, justice, and good conscience much earlier than the Western legal system. The principles of equality and good conscience were to temper the textual rigidity of the Law. Brihaspati Smṛiti cautions against blind adherence to statutes. According to Brihaspati, a decision should not be made solely by relying on the text of the Shastra; when a matter is considered through reason and common sense, the loss of dharma or justice results.<sup>1</sup> The court could also take cognizance suo motu. The *Saraswati Vilasa* sates the power of the king to *suo motu* take cognizance of specific public offenses (*aparadhapadas*) without a private complaint<sup>1</sup>. It also advocates for use of wisdom to resolve conflict between *yukti* (reason) and *lokayat* (popular practice). This nuanced approach reflects that there existed a sophisticated legal system where substantive justice was prioritised over rule-worship. King was expected to be impartial in deciding case as per the Shrutis and Smṛitis otherwise he would be guilty<sup>1</sup>.

The ascendancy of Dharma on the psyche of Indian in those times was so potent that people could never think of abandoning Dharma and endeavoured to preserve it by being under its guidance. The heart-wrenching story of King Harishchandra<sup>1</sup> revolves around the idealism of Dharma, highlights the importance of dharma in one's life. The King, while working as a scavenger in a cremation ground, asks his own wife to pay the charges for the pyre of his own son. Here, his wife questions why he is holding on to the Dharma. What sort of Dharma are you holding even today? In reply, the King says that I gave up my kingdom, sold my wife, son and myself for Dharma, how I could abandon that now. How can I give up Dharma when I have nothing? Those who do not stand for something fall for everything. There must be some principles in one's life to live by, some sort of fundamentals to abide by. '*Dharyate iti dharmā*' which means it is only the Dharma which upholds us. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad's statement '*तदेतदक्षत्रस्य क्षत्रं यद्धर्मः!*' holds true.

### **Ancient principles in modern legal system**

Examples of lawfulness are found throughout the ancient texts. From the independence of the judiciary to the rules of evidence, the Śāstric texts contain almost every aspect of judicial administration, thus earning the reputation of being the most sophisticated legal system of those times.

A stringent code of judicial ethics existed for the officers of justice. Katyayana Smṛiti prescribes the King's judicial conduct both inside and outside the court. He asserts that the King should enter the courtroom wearing modest attire, assume his seat facing east, and attentively hear the grievances of the litigants. The judges were to be impartial during the pendency of the suit; they were not to have any private talk or relations with the parties.<sup>1</sup>

### **Katyayana said as:**

*अनिर्णीते तु यद्धर्ते संभाषेत रहोऽर्थिना। प्राड्विवाकोऽथ दण्डयः स्यात्सभ्याश्चैव विशेषतः ॥*

It means if a judge was guilty of foul play, partiality, harassment or did not follow the correct legal procedure, he was to be punished. The clerk of the court, not taking the depositions correctly, was severely dealt with<sup>1</sup>. In modern times, inspired by the ancient text, the '*Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997)*' is a judicial ethics code adopted by the Supreme Court of India to serve as an ethical guide for an independent and fair judiciary, guaranteeing the impartial administration of justice. The Dharmashastra, like our constitution, provides for the qualification of judges. A person with knowledge of eighteen titles of Law and their eight thousand subdivisions would be qualified to become chief justice, in addition to being a master of *Vedas* and *Smṛiti*, with the ability to extract the truth from judicial proceedings<sup>1</sup>.

One of the cardinal principles of judicial proceedings was that a single judge should not administer the cases. A bench of two or more judges was preferred to administer justice. Manu clearly says that “*dharmarm savatamasritya kuryatkaryavinirnyam*<sup>1</sup>” which means that all decisions should be in accordance with Dharma, which affirms that no one is above the Law. The King and the members of his family were equally subject to the Law of the land as ordinary people. In a nutshell, the Smritis has laid down the foundation for an independent judiciary to ensure the supremacy of Dharma.

Parallels to equality under Article 14 of the Constitution of India are found in the Rigveda, which states that there is no superiority amongst persons and that every individual should strive for common welfare<sup>1</sup>. Unlike modern legal system, the ancient Indian texts mandated judicial accountability by providing penalties for judicial misconduct to ensure the integrity of the legal process. Narada Smriti declares that in case a verdict contrary to justice is passed, then the officers of the court, including the assessors must pay a fine and the king goes to hell.<sup>1</sup> In ancient India, everybody who participated in the administration of justice was accountable.

As per Modern jurisprudence, the primary sources of Law are custom, precedent and legislation. Legislation is given superiority over custom as the modern legislative system owes its origin to British law-making, where the Law passed by the King or Parliament is the Grundnorm. However, in the ancient Indian jurisprudence, we find that the customs, practices and usage, which are approved by people, prevailed over the written Law. In case any practice or usage, which being in inconformity to the Dharmasastras, yet it will prevail, and cannot be ignored based on the Smrits. It showcases that there existed the acceptance of the sovereignty of the people and the democratic character of the ancient society.

A verse in Vyasa Smriti<sup>1</sup> states that ‘*whenever it is found that there is a conflict between any provision contained in the Vedas and the provisions of the Smritis, Puranas, and customs etc. then what is declared in the Vedas alone shall prevail*’, is strikingly similar to Article 13 of the Indian Constitution, which establishes the rule of Law and states that any law passed by the legislature that is found to violate fundamental rights shall be void and the courts have the authority to make such a declaration<sup>1</sup>.

Similarly, the rules of evidence, which we see today, have their foundation in Sastric texts. According to Narada Smriti, written proofs and witnesses are the two expedients for ascertaining disputed facts in a civil matter. Narada gives a long list of incompetent witnesses, which includes individuals having stake in the suit, friends, associates, enemies, or persons of ill- repute. Much like modern-day procedural law, the judge should warn the witnesses about the punishment one would get in the afterlife if one speaks untruthfully. One of the punishments for

perjury was humiliation. Where the perjurer would enter the enemy's house, naked asking for alms.

### **Indian thought v/s Western thought.**

The anchor of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence is the command of sovereign being as the highest Law, as the principal mode of dispute resolution. Briefly stated, Austin begins by rejecting morality. A rejection of concepts like sovereignty, command, personality, rights, justice, and the separation of powers by Kelsen; then, again, the rejection of these concepts together with 'the binding force' or validity of Law and the objectivity of legal rules by Scandinavian realists. After the departure of ethics, metaphysics, normativity, all conceptual thinking and the central doctrines, Law seems to be that which has been laid down or some probability of pressure of 'meaningless scraps of paper' or labels or nonsense or 'mere fantasies of mind'. When we compare Indian and Western jurisprudence, not only are the underlying differences in academic outlook exposed, but also the ways in which a value system mismatch impacts the understanding of Law in society.

Austin's command theory portrays Law as a command of a sovereign backed by sanctions. The Austinian paradigm is a top-down model of law-making where the King, who is the determinate superior, issues commands to political inferiors who have to comply or face sanctions. This places Law as a mere act of the sovereign. The only sanctity behind such a law is that a political superior makes it. Indian jurisprudence is very different. Law, in its essence, is not any ruler's command. King does not make Law, nor is its sanctity based on divinity. The King is just the performer. If even he violates the Law or abstains from duty, he would face punishment. The concept that the King is infallible is absent here. The obedience of Law is not driven by fear, but rather by systematic experiences that lead to a value system. Radhabinod Pal explained the reason behind the obedience of the Law in India. He pointed out that the obedience to Law emerged as a value system as a result of lived experiences/ *vrata*.<sup>1</sup> *Vrata* can be viewed as an early form of Law in society. While the compliance of *rita* or natural order was a must, people had freedom with *vrata*, which are a set of ordained rules associated with deities guiding behaviour. The people can choose to follow it or not. Observance of these *vrata* brought prosperity. Over time, social habits were created, and people learned self-discipline.<sup>1</sup> Western thought connotes Law with external imposition and not moral guidance. When the Law is solely based on sanctions, its disobedience is seen simply as a violation. Austin reduces Law to mere habitual obedience based on fear of sanction. Nevertheless, he fails to explain why there is habitual obedience. Here, the sanction of Dharma is internal. Individuals adhere to the Law for their own good.

Yājñavalkya call it the doctrine of self-love (*ātma-kāma*)<sup>1</sup>. Man is capable of discerning and reasoning to regulate his life in pursuit of higher ends, which serve

his own best interest. He points out that individuals follow the Law because of self-love, as adherence to it has brought an ordered and meaningful life. Thus, the authority of Law lies not merely in external compulsion but in an enlightened form of self-love, since it ultimately secures individual well-being in harmony with society. *Kāthopaniṣad* articulates the difference between what is merely pleasant (*preya*) and what is truly good (*śreya*)<sup>1</sup>, Scandinavian realism jurist A Ross realised that Law cannot be explained validly in terms of force. He comes very near to our notion of Dharma as binding from within, but in a different way. He says that valid Law means the abstract set of normative ideas, which serve as a scheme of interpretation for the phenomena of Law in action, which again means that these norms are effectively followed because they are experienced and felt to be socially binding.<sup>1</sup> According to Kohler and Pound's jural postulates, society followed rules because these were meaningful and brought good. The King does no wrong, or the supremacy of the ruler, is reflected in Western jurisprudence. However, in India, the Law was never perceived as being subservient to any ruler but as King of kings. Just as in the present age, the Supreme Court is the watchdog of our rights, but that does not mean it is above the law. It works within the framework of the constitution, and this is true of the king as well. Unlike the Analytical theorists' sovereign-centric Law, Vedic seers positioned Law (Dharma) as a cosmic and moral force to which even the kings were bound. The story of King Bimbisara, as recorded by Hieun Tsiang, is the evidence of this. It is said that in order to prevent fire, which became relatively frequent at that time, the King passed a law that anybody whose house the fire broke out in would be banished. One day, fire broke out in the capital itself, whereon the King banished himself to maintain the laws of the country.

In the Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence, the idea of resolving disputes through alternative resolution is rejected on the premise that legal rights cannot be waived, and the resolution of disputes has to be based on merit. This system remains deep-seated in our legal mechanism. Upendra Baxi believes that the British Indian model of law-making is an Austinian paradigm, in which inferiors must comply with commands or risk sanctions<sup>1</sup>. This model does not inspire confidence among citizens of India<sup>1</sup>. The Malimath Committee, in its report, questioned the gaps in the adversarial system. It pointed out that, in an adversarial system, the judge seldom takes the initiative to determine the truth, unlike in an inquisitorial system<sup>1</sup>. The committee recommended strengthening this system by adopting features of the inquisitorial system.<sup>1</sup>

Dharma is devoid of rigidity. People were to do things as they wished; the Dharmashastras set out the actions an individual ought to perform. In times of emergency, Dharma should not be followed. According to Desh, Kala, and Yug, the contents might vary. This is expressed in the popular aphorism 'आपत काले मर्यादा नास्त', which, in Western jurisprudence, means that need is a law unto

itself. For in such times of emergence, it is reasonable to believe that Dharma cannot finally be known; its aspect is cloaked in mystery, since no one can fully comprehend it for all time.

## Conclusion

The Indian understanding of Law stands out as a distinctive and lively philosophy which is fundamentally different from Western legal philosophy. It is the bedrock of legal philosophy and envisions Law not as the command of a sovereign, but as Dharma, which represents a transcendent cosmic order that supervises the cosmos and all beings. This comprehension is founded in ancient texts such as Rta, Satya, and Dharma. When we study modern Indian constitutionalism and trace its origins, the relevance of Dharma becomes indubitable. Indian jurisprudence, unlike Western thought, emphasises Law as a self-sustaining force akin to truth, justice, and harmony. The concept of Dharma remains relevant, evident in principles such as the rule of Law, judicial review, and procedural rules, found in the Constitution of India and other legislation, which have their roots in ancient texts.

Ancient Indian jurisprudence continues to offer perspicacity for modern legal systems seeking justice and integrity. Thus, the heritage of Indian jurisprudence is not just archival but a living tradition that continues to influence and can enhance legal theory and practice.

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**Brief Profile of Author**

**OSHIN SHARMA** is a practising advocate at the Rajasthan High Court. Currently, she is pursuing a PhD from Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur. She holds an LL.M. in Criminal Law and is UGC NET qualified. She has a keen interest in reading philosophical subjects and jurisprudence.

**Mob:** +91 8107391912

**E-mail:** 23500oshin@gmail.com

## 12.

# Indian Knowledge Systems and Disaster Management: Community- Centred Resilience from the Grassroots

**Mrs. Shruti Agarwal**

*Consultant (Disaster Management)  
Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of  
Public Administration Government of Punjab  
Research scholar, Shoolini University,  
Solon (Himachal Pradesh)*

**Dr. Supriya Srivastava**

*Associate Professor (Public Policy & Socio-eco Devt),  
(Disaster Management) Faculty of Management Sciences,  
Shoolini University, Solon (Himachal Pradesh)*

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### Abstract

*In many corners of India, before government alerts arrive or satellite images are shared, communities already know when danger is near. A shift in the wind, the early blooming of a tree, the sudden silence of birds—these are signs that people have relied on for generations. This is not superstition—it’s observation, memory, and survival. These ways of understanding and responding to nature are part of what we call the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). In today’s world, where climate change is making natural disasters more frequent and intense, it’s easy to lean only on technology for answers. But in doing so, we risk overlooking something equally powerful: our own lived knowledge, passed down through stories, practices, and everyday life. This chapter explores how traditional wisdom—practiced quietly in villages and forests, in mountains and deserts—can offer meaningful solutions to modern disaster challenges. We begin by looking at communities in North India, where people still depend on the knowledge of their elders and the rhythms of nature to prepare for floods, droughts, earthquakes, and heatwaves. In Uttarakhand, for instance, villagers grow crops on terraced slopes that naturally resist landslides, and build stone houses that can withstand tremors. In Rajasthan, water is captured and stored in ancient systems like johads and kunds—offering a lifeline during long summers. In Punjab and Haryana, farmers still talk about the sky, the moon, and the winds when deciding when to sow and harvest—wisdom rooted in generations of close attention to the land. What’s striking is that these practices aren’t just old—they’re effective. They reduce risk, protect livelihoods, and build community strength. They are often more inclusive, more affordable, and more connected to the environment than many modern solutions. And yet, they are slowly being forgotten.*

*This chapter doesn't suggest replacing science with tradition. Instead, it argues for bringing them together. Disaster management shouldn't only be about policies and protocols; it should also be about people, places, and their ways of knowing. Traditional knowledge systems— especially in disaster-prone regions—can support, inform, and enrich modern risk reduction efforts. The chapter will highlight real stories, not just theories. We'll hear from women in Bundelkhand who store seeds underground in clay pots to protect them from drought. From tribal elders in Himachal Pradesh who know the signs of a coming cloudburst. From farmers in Uttar Pradesh who still trust their grandfather's wisdom when reading the sky. We will also look at how this knowledge can be scaled and shared—through local schools, village disaster plans, and state-level policy frameworks. And we'll discuss the barriers too: the risk of losing knowledge due to migration, the need to document oral traditions, and the challenge of ensuring communities remain the owners of their knowledge. In the end, this chapter is about rebalancing the conversation—valuing the deep intelligence found in tradition, and finding ways to honour it in today's disaster management systems. If we truly want resilience, we need solutions that come not just from the top down, but from the ground up.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Knowledge, Disaster Risk Reduction, Community Resilience, Traditional Water and Land Management, North India*

## **1. Introduction: Listening to the Land**

Long before satellites mapped storm trajectories or Doppler radars tracked rainfall, Indian communities relied on the land, skies, and seasons for survival. Farmers in Rajasthan watched the flowering of *Cassia fistula* (Amaltās) and *Nyctanthes arbor-tristis* (Pārijāt) to predict monsoon onset. Himalayan villagers observed the clarity of skies and bird migrations to anticipate landslides or cloudbursts. These observations, refined over centuries, were not incidental but part of an inherited knowledge system deeply integrated into daily life.

Ancient texts reflect this continuity of observation. The Atharva Veda includes hymns on winds, rains, and healing herbs; Varāhamihira's *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* (6th century CE) systematized meteorological signs, such as the shape of clouds or the position of planets, for rainfall prediction; and Kālidāsa's *Ritusambhāra* poetically mapped seasonal rhythms that guided agriculture and rituals. Later compilations like the *Gurusamhita* offered detailed rules of weather forecasting rooted in astronomical alignments.<sup>199</sup>

Archaeological evidence also demonstrates that disaster management was not

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<sup>199</sup> Devendra Bajpai, *The Gurusamhita: An Ancient Text on Weather-Forecasting* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1983).

alien to ancient India. The Harappans, for example, constructed elaborate drainage and reservoir systems to mitigate floods (Harappan Technology and its Legacy, Agrawal). Medieval builders of Mewar and Tamil Nadu developed tanks, canals, and bunds that ensured water security in drought-prone regions (Bhadani; Mukundan). These were not only engineering feats but cultural strategies for resilience, embedded in ritual, governance, and community responsibility.

Today, as India confronts climate-driven disasters—flash floods in Himachal Pradesh, drought in Bundelkhand, and heatwaves in Rajasthan—the urgency of revisiting IKS becomes clear. While modern science offers precision forecasting, it often overlooks the granular, context-rich wisdom of communities who live within these hazard-prone landscapes. The integration of IKS with contemporary science thus promises a more inclusive and adaptive framework for disaster preparedness and resilience.

## **2. Understanding Indian Knowledge Systems in Everyday Practice**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is not a static body of rules but a living framework shaped by centuries of human interaction with nature. It emerges from close observation, practical experience, and cultural transmission. Unlike modern science, which often privileges written texts and laboratories, IKS has thrived in oral traditions, rituals, architecture, and everyday practices.

### **Agriculture and Seasonal Forecasting**

Farmers across India historically synchronized their activities with natural indicators rather than fixed calendars. In Punjab and Haryana, sowing decisions were often guided by lunar phases (nakṣatras), wind patterns like the loo, and soil moisture levels<sup>200</sup>. In Rajasthan, the blooming of Amaltās (*Cassia fistula*) or Pārijāt (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) signaled the arrival of monsoons, a practice recently validated by agro-meteorological studies<sup>201</sup>. These cues ensured that agriculture remained resilient even in climates of uncertainty.

### **Water and Architecture**

IKS is equally visible in hydraulic engineering. The Harappans developed sophisticated drainage and reservoir systems that minimized flood risks, as seen in Mohenjo-daro and Dholavira<sup>202</sup>.

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<sup>200</sup> Singh and Sharma, *Agroecology in Semi-Arid India: Resilience in Bundelkhand* (Jhansi: Bundelkhand Agroecology Trust, 2020).

<sup>201</sup> S. Chaudhuri and P. Nath, “Phenological Indicators and Rainfall Prediction in Eastern India,” *Indian Journal of Environmental Sciences* 23, no. 2 (2019): 115–27.

<sup>202</sup> D. P. Agrawal, *Harappan Technology and Its Legacy* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2009).

Later, medieval kingdoms such as the Sisodiyas of Mewar constructed tanks, canals, and stepwells that simultaneously addressed water scarcity and created cultural landmarks.<sup>203</sup> In South India, the ery (tank) systems of Tamil Nadu—thousands of interconnected water bodies—functioned as both irrigation networks and drought buffers.<sup>204</sup> Beyond their technical value, these water systems were embedded in religious practices: stepwells and tanks doubled as sacred spaces, reinforcing<sup>205</sup> collective responsibility for maintenance.

### **Architecture and Disaster Awareness**

Traditional architecture demonstrates a similar fusion of engineering and resilience. In Gujarat, circular bhunga houses withstand seismic tremors by distributing stress evenly. In the Himalayas, timber–stone hybrid houses balance flexibility and stability in landslide-prone zones. These designs embody local understanding of environmental hazards long before the emergence of modern structural engineering.

### **Custodians of Knowledge**

Women, elders, and tribal leaders often serve as custodians of IKS. Women in particular preserve oral memory through stories, songs, and proverbs; they maintain seed banks, administer herbal remedies (nuskhe), and transmit ecological knowledge to younger generations. This custodianship not only sustains household health but also strengthens community-level resilience in times of scarcity or disaster.

Taken together, these practices reveal that IKS was never merely about survival—it was about cultivating harmony with nature, embedding resilience within culture, and ensuring continuity through shared responsibility.

## **3. Voices from the Regions: North Indian Stories of Resilience**

### **Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh**

In the fragile Himalayan belt, landslides, cloudbursts, and flash floods are recurring threats. Communities here developed adaptive strategies that were as cultural as they were technical. Traditional houses were constructed with local stone and timber, combining rigidity and flexibility for seismic resilience. Irrigation was managed through gool channels—small canals that diverted excess rainfall away from settlements while ensuring crop water supply.

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<sup>203</sup> B. L. Bhadani, *Water Harvesting, Conservation and Irrigation in Mewar (AD 800–1700)* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

<sup>204</sup> T. M. Mukundan, *The Ery Systems of South India* (Madras: State Planning Commission, 1992).

<sup>205</sup> Fredrick W. Bunce, *The Iconography of Water: Well and Tank Forms of the Indian Subcontinent* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1994).

Equally significant were settlement choices shaped by cosmology. In Himachal, people avoided constructing houses at the very top or the bottom of hills. The upper ridges were revered as the abode of the devi—the goddess seen as the source of all energy—while the valley bottoms were believed to belong to the devta, the guardian and sustainer of the community.

This spatial ethic was more than religious devotion: it reduced exposure to landslides from the slopes above and floods from rivers below. In effect, sacred geography doubled as disaster- safe planning. Oral traditions also continue to stress the importance of ecological cues. The clarity of skies, sudden stillness in winds, or the movement of animals often signaled impending storms. During the 2013 Kedarnath disaster, some communities relied on such indicators and evacuated earlier than others, underscoring the value of inherited wisdom alongside modern alerts.<sup>206</sup>

## **Rajasthan**

In Rajasthan's arid landscape, scarcity of water shaped culture, architecture, and ritual alike. Communities devised water-harvesting systems such as johads (earthen check dams), kunds (underground cisterns), and baoris (stepwells). These structures were not only functional but also sacred. A baori often carried inscriptions dedicating it to a deity, and women performed small rituals before drawing water, affirming collective responsibility for its care.

Oral traditions describe water as a gift of the gods, and neglect of tanks or wells was seen as a moral failure as much as a technical lapse.

In Alwar and Jodhpur, community-led revivals of johads in recent decades have shown that such traditions remain viable, low-cost solutions. Historical records from Mewar further reveal how rulers institutionalized tank building as a duty of kingship, embedding water security into the moral fabric of governance.<sup>207</sup>

## **Punjab and Haryana**

The fertile plains of Punjab and Haryana are today associated with industrial agriculture, but traditional practices reveal a deep ecological awareness. Farmers aligned their sowing cycles with the rhythms of the moon (nakṣatras) and winds such as the fierce loo of early summer. Festivals like Baisakhi and Lohri were not just celebrations—they encoded seasonal memory, reminding communities of the

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<sup>206</sup> R. Joshi, *Mountain Memories: Disaster and Survival in Uttarakhand* (Dehradun: Himalayan Publications, 2015).

<sup>207</sup> B. L. Bhadani, *Water Harvesting, Conservation and Irrigation in Mewar (AD 800–1700)* (Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

cycles of rain, harvest, and drought. Women in rural households played a key role as custodians of these rhythms. They preserved seeds, monitored soil moisture through touch and smell, and sang folk songs that linked weather changes to divine will. These oral traditions kept ecological knowledge alive across generations, reinforcing that farming was as much a cultural practice as an economic activity.

These practices were accompanied by cultural memory. Folk songs known as rasiya narrate the hardships of drought and the strategies of endurance, turning ecological struggle into collective identity. Rituals of thanksgiving during years of good rain reinforced gratitude and humility before nature's cycles.<sup>208</sup> In this way, Bundelkhand's IKS embodied not just material adaptation but an ethic of resilience rooted in community solidarity.

### **Extending Beyond North India**

Although this section focuses on North India, parallels exist elsewhere. In Tamil Nadu, ery tank systems managed monsoon waters through intricate community rules, while in Karnataka inscriptions documented precise land and water measurement systems that structured equitable irrigation.<sup>209</sup> These regional variations, while diverse in technique, were united by a shared principle: resilience was achieved by weaving ecological awareness into social and cultural life.

### **4. Tradition Meets Technology: Building a Shared Approach**

Indian Knowledge Systems are not in opposition to modern science. Instead, they offer insights that, when validated and integrated, can enrich contemporary disaster risk reduction strategies. Traditional forecasting methods, water systems, and architectural practices provide context-specific knowledge, while modern technologies bring precision, scalability, and data-driven models. The challenge is not choosing between them, but weaving them together into a shared approach.

### **Phenology and Forecasting**

Farmers in Tripura, for example, observe the flowering of Amaltās (*Cassia fistula*) and Pārijāt (*Nyctanthes arbor-tristis*) as predictors of rainfall. Recent studies show that these phenological indicators often align<sup>210</sup> with India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts. When such community observations are digitized and combined with satellite data, they enrich predictive models with locally grounded cues that enhance credibility among rural populations.

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<sup>208</sup> P. Singh and N. Sharma, *Agroecology in Semi-Arid India: Resilience in Bundelkhand* (Jhansi: Bundelkhand Agroecology Trust, 2020).

<sup>209</sup> Jagadish, *Measurement System in Karnataka (AD 325 to 1700)* (Bangalore: Prasaranga, 2001).

<sup>210</sup> S. Chaudhuri and P. Nath, "Phenological Indicators and Rainfall Prediction in Eastern India," *Indian Journal of Environmental Sciences* 23, no. 2 (2019): 115–27.

## **Participatory GIS and Hazard Mapping**

In Himalayan regions, local communities mark sacred groves, landslide-prone slopes, and flood routes based on memory and oral history. When this knowledge is incorporated into Geographic Information Systems (GIS), maps become not only technically accurate but socially meaningful. Projects that have combined local hazard markers with digital terrain mapping report higher acceptance of evacuation<sup>211</sup> drills and early-warning alerts.

## **Water Management Revivals**

Traditional hydraulic systems also demonstrate the potential of hybrid models. In Rajasthan, the revival of johads and stepwells by communities, supported by non-governmental organizations, has been strengthened through hydrological modeling and satellite-based groundwater<sup>212</sup> mapping. Such integration shows how ancient water wisdom can be scaled for contemporary drought adaptation.

## **Education and Cultural Integration**

Disaster education, too, benefits from cultural grounding. School-based DRR programs that use folk songs, storytelling, and traditional proverbs about weather and seasons have proven more effective in rural outreach than abstract technical lectures. Embedding IKS within curricula, as suggested in the Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India modules developed for CBSE, provides students with both cultural identity and scientific<sup>213</sup> awareness.

In this sense, tradition does not replace technology, nor does technology erase tradition. Instead, the synergy between the two generates a richer, more inclusive resilience framework—one that respects community memory while harnessing modern tools for greater precision.

## **5. Policy and People: Making Room for Local Knowledge**

The global policy environment has increasingly recognized the importance of indigenous and local knowledge in disaster resilience. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) explicitly calls for the integration of “traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices” into disaster policies<sup>214</sup> and strategies. India’s own National Disaster Management Plan

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<sup>211</sup> P. Rautela, “Traditional Knowledge for Disaster Mitigation in the Indian Himalaya: An Overview,” *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* 4, no. 1 (2005): 7–14.

<sup>212</sup> Centre for Science and Environment, *Dying Wisdom: Rise, Fall and Potential of India’s Traditional Water- Harvesting Systems* (New Delhi: CSE, 1997).

<sup>213</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Michel Danino, eds., *Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India* (New Delhi: CBSE, 2013).

<sup>214</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Michel Danino, eds., *Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India* (New Delhi:

(NDMP, 2019 revision) also acknowledges the value of local practices for preparedness and adaptation. Yet, in practice, these commitments remain under-implemented, often overshadowed by top-down, technocratic approaches.

### **Bridging Policy and Practice**

To translate recognition into action, institutional innovation is required. One promising approach is the establishment of IKS Documentation Units within State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs). Such units could catalogue region-specific practices—whether Himachal’s avoidance of ridge-top housing, Rajasthan’s stepwell rituals, or Bundelkhand’s drought songs—and make them accessible in bilingual or multilingual formats.

### **Education as Integration**

Another pathway is embedding IKS into school curricula and village-level disaster plans. This aligns with the NCERT–CBSE modules on “Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India,” which already include units on agriculture, astronomy, and water management. By situating disaster awareness within familiar cultural frameworks—folk songs, proverbs, local stories—DRR education becomes more relatable and memorable, particularly for rural<sup>215</sup> youth.

### **Community-Led Projects**

Policy must also support community-led revivals of traditional practices. Funding should prioritize grassroots initiatives, especially those involving women and elders, who serve as custodians of oral memory and ecological knowledge. Successful examples include the NGO-supported revival of johads in Alwar, which combined local rituals with modern hydrology to restore both water security and social<sup>216</sup> cohesion.

### **Digital Repositories**

Finally, India could develop digital repositories of region-specific IKS, hosted on national portals and linked to district disaster management plans. These could feature open-access maps of traditional water bodies, audio-visual documentation of rituals and proverbs, and translated manuals of ancient forecasting texts like *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* and *Gurusamhita*. By combining scholarship with accessibility, such repositories would ensure that IKS is preserved not as folklore, but as living, actionable knowledge.

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CBSE, 2013).

<sup>215</sup> Centre for Science and Environment, *Making Water Everybody’s Business: Practice and Policy of Water Harvesting* (New Delhi: CSE, 2001).

<sup>216</sup> Deepak Kumar, *Science and the Raj: A Study of British India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

In short, making room for IKS in disaster management is not merely about cultural preservation. It is about enhancing legitimacy, trust, and participation in resilience planning, ensuring that communities are not passive recipients of external directives but active bearers of solutions.

## **6. Facing the Gaps: Challenges and Opportunities**

While Indian Knowledge Systems provide a deep reservoir of resilience strategies, their integration into modern disaster management is not without challenges. Several structural, cultural, and ethical gaps stand in the way.

### **Erosion of Knowledge**

Rapid urbanization, labor migration, and generational shifts are eroding the continuity of oral traditions. Younger generations, drawn to formal education and wage labor, often view traditional practices as outdated. In Bundelkhand, for instance, songs about drought resilience are remembered by elders but rarely sung by youth. Similarly, in Himachal, the cultural rationale for avoiding ridge-top or valley-bottom housing has faded as concrete construction spreads.

### **Skepticism and Legitimacy**

Policymakers and technocrats often dismiss IKS as anecdotal or unscientific. This skepticism has roots in colonial history, when indigenous practices were marginalized in favor of “rational” Western<sup>19</sup> science. The result is a knowledge hierarchy where local wisdom is treated as secondary or symbolic rather than operational. Overcoming this requires careful validation—not to strip knowledge of its cultural form, but to demonstrate its empirical relevance.

### **Fragmentation of Practices**

IKS is highly localized. A forecasting practice that works in one district may not apply in another. This diversity, while a strength, also makes it harder to systematize at state or national levels. Documentation efforts must therefore respect local specificity rather than impose homogenization.

### **Ethical Concerns**

There are also ethical dimensions. Communities must retain ownership of their knowledge and be recognized as co-creators in any project that uses it. Too often, researchers extract local knowledge without attribution, or NGOs frame traditional practices as their own “innovations.”

Safeguards are needed to ensure that IKS is preserved with dignity and that communities benefit directly from its application.

## **Opportunities Ahead**

Despite these gaps, opportunities for renewal are abundant. Digital platforms allow for rapid documentation and dissemination of local practices. Collaborations between scientists and villagers can generate hybrid solutions—such as combining satellite rainfall data with phenological cues. The growing global emphasis on “nature-based solutions” in climate policy also creates a space for Indian traditions to gain international recognition.

In short, while erosion and skepticism present real challenges, they also highlight the urgency of action. If documented, validated, and ethically preserved, IKS can re-emerge as a cornerstone of disaster resilience—one that is not only technically sound but also culturally rooted.

## **7. A New Way Forward: Resilience That Belongs to Everyone**

Disaster resilience cannot be built solely through infrastructure, early-warning systems, or international frameworks. While these are indispensable, they often overlook the cultural, ethical, and emotional dimensions of how communities live with risk. Indian Knowledge Systems remind us that communities are not only vulnerable populations—they are also knowledge-holders, innovators, and custodians of resilience.

A new way forward lies in weaving together the precision of modern science with the depth of traditional wisdom. Meteorological forecasts can be enriched by phenological cues such as the flowering of *Amaltās* and *Pārijāt*. GIS hazard maps gain legitimacy when layered with oral histories of floods and sacred markers of safe ground. Structural codes for seismic safety can draw inspiration from Himalayan timber–stone hybrid houses, while urban water policy can revive the ethos of *johads* and *baoris* that combined functionality with community stewardship.

This integration must also be inclusive and ethical. Women, elders, and tribal leaders—long the custodians of oral and ecological knowledge—must be recognized as central actors, not peripheral informants. Policies must ensure community ownership of traditional practices, with benefits returning to those who preserve them. Academic validation should respect cultural integrity rather than reducing oral wisdom to technical data points. Above all, resilience must be understood not as a checklist of measures, but as a relationship of trust, belonging, and memory. When communities see their traditions valued in policy and education, they are more likely to engage actively in disaster preparedness. When modern science listens to ancestral voices, its solutions become more rooted, adaptive, and humane. In this sense, the way forward is not about reviving tradition as a museum piece, nor about privileging technology as the only path. It is about creating a shared framework of resilience that belongs to everyone—scientists and farmers, policymakers and elders, engineers and storytellers. For

India, this is not merely a cultural choice but a strategic necessity in the age of climate change.

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## **Brief profile of Author**

### **Mrs. Shruti Agarwal**

*Consultant (Disaster Management), Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration (MGSIPA), Government of Punjab*

*Research Scholar, Shoolini University, Himachal Pradesh*

**Mrs. Shruti Agarwal** is a disaster management professional and researcher dedicated to advancing resilience-based governance and integrating indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary disaster management frameworks. She holds a postgraduate degree in Disaster Management and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. at Shoolini University, Solan. With several years of experience in policy development, institutional preparedness planning, and capacity building, she has been instrumental in designing and implementing training programs for civil servants, first responders, and community volunteers at MGSIPA.

Her academic and professional work focuses on community-centred resilience, climate adaptation, and disaster risk education. She has contributed to research and publications exploring the intersection of traditional ecological wisdom and modern risk management strategies. Passionate about inclusive and sustainable development, Mrs. Agarwal emphasizes the integration of gender perspectives, local governance, and indigenous practices in disaster preparedness and response planning.

**Mob:** 9988746423

**E-mail:** [shrutiag862@gmail.com](mailto:shrutiag862@gmail.com)

### **Brief profile of Co-Author**

**Dr Supriya Srivastava** is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Management Sciences and Liberal Arts at Shoolini University, Himachal Pradesh. She holds a PhD in Social Development from the University of Lucknow, along with dual postgraduate degrees—M.A. in Sociology with specialisation in Social Development (University of Lucknow) and M.B.A. in Human Resource Management (Punjab Technical University). Her undergraduate education in Economics and Sociology from Isabella Thoburn College, University of Lucknow, laid a strong foundation for her interdisciplinary academic pursuits. She also holds postgraduate diplomas in Rural Development, Disaster Management, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Yoga Science, reflecting her commitment to holistic education. With over 14 years of academic and research experience, Dr. Srivastava's work spans social development, human resource management, gender studies, disaster management, and yoga philosophy. She has published extensively in national and international journals, authored book chapters, and guided numerous student research projects. Dedicated to integrating ethics and excellence, she strives to develop capable professionals and compassionate citizens.

**Mob:** +91 7018413284

**E-Mail:** [supriya@shooliniuniversity.com](mailto:supriya@shooliniuniversity.com)

## 13.

# Assessing the adequacy of International Human Rights Protections for Persons Displaced or Affected by Climate Change

Dr. A. Suganthini

**Bhuvaneshwari. M**

*Assistant Professor of Law*

*VISTAS*

*Mob: 9360020794*

*Email: bhuvimadhusudhanan4@gmail.com*

*July 31, 2025*

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### **Abstract**

*In the contemporary era, climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges, reshaping global systems and undermining fundamental human rights. One of its most severe consequences is the large-scale displacement of populations due to sea-level rise, extreme weather events, prolonged droughts, and environmental degradation. These phenomena jeopardize livelihoods, exacerbate food insecurity, and undermine the stability of entire ecosystems, affecting not only human communities but also animals, plants, and biodiversity as a whole.*

*Traditionally, individuals who are forced to flee their homes due to a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds such as race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion are recognized as refugees under international law. These individuals are protected by the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 (commonly known as the 1951 Refugee Convention), and its 1967 Protocol. However, persons displaced by environmental and climate-related factors often do not meet the criteria outlined in these instruments and are therefore excluded from formal refugee protections.*

*This research critically assesses the adequacy of international human rights frameworks in safeguarding the rights of environmentally displaced persons (EDPs). It explores the extent to which existing legal instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and relevant regional human rights treaties, provide meaningful and enforceable protections. By identifying legal gaps and evaluating jurisprudence and soft law developments, this study aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on climate-induced displacement and advocate for a more inclusive and rights-based approach to international protection. Integrating insights from India's traditional ecological*

wisdom, the paper emphasizes harmony between human rights and environmental ethics, reflecting the Indian Knowledge System's vision of coexistence between humans and nature. Further, the study adopts a doctrinal methodology. This paper highlights key protection gaps and advocates for a cohesive legal framework or a reinterpretation of existing norms to safeguard the rights of environmentally displaced persons. By framing climate-induced displacement as a human rights issue, it underscores the need for a rights-based approach to climate governance and calls for critical international cooperation and legal reform.

**Keywords:** *International Human Rights Law, Climate-Induced Refugees, Refugee Conventions, Legal Recognition, Climate Change.*

## **1. Introduction:**

In today's era, climate change stands among humanity's gravest challenges, reshaping ecosystems, economies, and societies worldwide. Driven by anthropogenic activities, notably fossil fuel combustion, deforestation, and industrial emissions, it manifests through rising temperatures, erratic weather, and an alarming rise in extreme climatic events. Global responses have evolved through collective frameworks under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), established in 1992 as the cornerstone of global climate governance. Instruments such as the Kyoto Protocol, 1997, and the Paris Agreement, 2015, advanced cooperation on mitigation and adaptation, yet neither directly addresses the human displacement caused by environmental degradation.

The effects of climate change extend far beyond environmental loss; they disrupt social and economic systems, forcing people to abandon homes and livelihoods. However, those displaced by environmental causes, often called *climate migrants* or *climate refugees*, fall outside the scope of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which protect only those fleeing persecution. This legal vacuum leaves millions without protection or resettlement rights. From a human rights perspective, instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) affirm the inherent dignity and equality of all persons. Though they do not explicitly mention climate change, rights to life, housing, food, and health acquire renewed significance in the context of climate-induced displacement. Yet, protection for such displaced persons remains fragmented and uncertain.

This paper examines these normative gaps within international law and argues that climate-induced displacement must be framed as a human-rights and justice issue, requiring binding state obligations, international cooperation, and ethical accountability. It further draws on India's traditional ecological wisdom, which regards nature as integral to human existence. Principles such as *Prakriti Dharma*

(duty toward nature), *Sarvodaya* (universal welfare), and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world as one family) from the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) embody an ethos of balance and collective responsibility. These concepts resonate with modern sustainability and intergenerational equity, reinforcing the moral dimension of climate governance. Through this synthesis of international law, human rights, and IKS philosophy, the study calls for aligning environmental protection with human dignity, promoting a rights-based, ethically grounded, and sustainable approach to climate-induced displacement.

## **2. Climate change: A Global Threat to Human and Ecological Security: Defining Climate Displacement: From “Environmental Refugees” to “Climate-Displaced Persons”:**

The idea of climate displacement has evolved as environmental disruptions increasingly force communities to migrate. The term *environmental refugee* entered global debate in 1985 when the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) described people compelled to leave their homes because environmental disturbances, either natural or human-made, threatened their survival. This definition laid the foundation for understanding displacement caused by sea-level rise, droughts, and desertification.

Despite this growing awareness, international law still operates within a narrow framework. The 1951 Refugee Convention protects only those fleeing persecution on specific grounds, excluding environmental causes. Consequently, people displaced by climate impacts do not qualify as “refugees,” creating a persistent protection vacuum.

To fill this gap, various terms have emerged *climate migrants*, *disaster-displaced persons*, or *environmentally induced migrants*. The UNHCR discourages the label “climate refugee”, warning it may blur the legal meaning of “refugee.” Instead, it promotes the more neutral expression “persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change.”

The term climate-displaced persons (CDPs) has since gained wider acceptance as an inclusive category referring to people compelled to move within or across borders, because climate change renders their homes uninhabitable or livelihoods unsustainable. Such movement arises from both sudden-onset disasters (floods, cyclones) and slow-onset processes (drought, salinisation, ecosystem collapse).

### **Three factors complicate this definition:**

- a) Causation overlaps:** displacement interacts with the social, economic, and political vulnerabilities.
- b) Temporal complexity:** slow-onset degradation makes it difficult to pinpoint when “displacement” begins.
- c) Legal invisibility:** climate impacts are not recognised as persecution, leaving cross-border CDPs outside the law despite facing similar threats to life and dignity.

To address these challenges, soft-law frameworks such as the *Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda, 2015*, and the *Platform on Disaster Displacement (2016-present)* have advanced cooperation and policy guidance. These initiatives reflect a growing consensus that climate-linked displacement must be treated as both a human-rights and a climate-justice issue.

From the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), displacement caused by ecological imbalance disrupts the moral harmony between humans and nature. Rooted in *Dharma* (righteous duty) and *Prakriti Samskara* (respectful stewardship of nature), IKS philosophy links ecological stability with ethical responsibility. Integrating these values with international human-rights norms can create a holistic framework that unites legal protection with the duty to restore balance between humanity and the environment.

Accordingly, this research adopts the term climate-displaced persons to encompass those compelled to move by both sudden and gradual climate impacts, grounding the concept in rights-based and ethically informed principles drawn from global law and India's ecological wisdom.

## **2.1 The Nexus Between Climate Change and Human Displacement**

This represents the harsh reality confronting millions of individuals displaced by climate-induced phenomena. According to data from the International Displacement Monitoring Centre, an annual average of 21.5 million people were forcibly displaced between 2008 and 2016 as a result of weather-related events such as floods, storms, wildfires, and droughts. This figure escalated to a record 32.6 million in 2022, reflecting the growing severity of climate impacts. Furthermore, projections by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), an international think tank, indicate that the number of displaced persons could rise substantially, with an estimated 1.2 billion people potentially displaced worldwide by 2050 due to the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and natural disasters.

## **2.2 Climate Change and Its Impact on Ecology – Ensuring that ecosystems retain the capacity to naturally adjust and respond to climate-induced transformations.**

The pace and scale of climate change determine how effectively species, populations, and ecosystems can adapt. In many cases, the rate of global warming may surpass the ability of certain species to shift their natural ranges, leaving them vulnerable or even leading to extinction. Species that are already endangered, have very specific habitat needs, or live in fragmented environments face the highest risks. Likewise, fragile natural systems such as coral reefs, mangroves, coastal wetlands, prairie marshes, native grasslands, mountain habitats, and regions with permafrost are especially sensitive to temperature changes.

Even a regional temperature rise of less than 1°C by 2100 could negatively affect these ecosystems. If global temperatures increase by 1°C to 2°C, the resulting

regional climate shifts could cause severe stress, irreversible damage, or loss of certain species and ecosystems. Beyond a 2°C increase, the threats would intensify dramatically, escalating the likelihood of widespread ecological disruption and biodiversity decline.

### **Marine Ecosystems Have Reached a Tipping Point of No Return:**

However, we have entered a new reality: according to the latest studies, coral reef ecosystems have reached a tipping point of no return. Not only are these reefs collapsing, but nearly a quarter of all marine species that depend on them are also crossing that threshold. Even if global warming is held at 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, most warm-water reefs are still projected to collapse. Currently, we are already at about 1.2 °C of global warming, and reefs across the tropics are bleaching, dying off, and disappearing, dragging entire ocean ecosystems with them. The same reports sound a warning that ecosystems such as the Amazon rainforest and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation are next in line.<sup>217</sup>

### **3. International human Rights Law and Concepts Relevant to Climate Displacement - mapping of rights:**

International human rights law provides a broad and evolving framework for addressing the injustices arising from climate-induced displacement. While the most human rights instruments were not originally designed to tackle environmental crises, their universal and cross-cutting principles offer strong foundations for protecting individuals whose rights are threatened by climate change. These principles, like universality, equality, and dignity which extend to all persons, regardless of nationality or status, including those displaced by environmental degradation.

#### **The primary instruments forming this normative base include:**

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)
- Regional treaties such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the American Convention on Human Rights
- Non-binding, i.e., soft law instruments such as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015)

Together, these documents form a global system recognizing that every person is entitled to life, security, dignity, and a safe environment.

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<sup>217</sup> *Global Tipping Points Report 2025*, ed. Tim Lenton et al. (Exeter: University of Exeter and Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2025), <https://www.global-tipping-points.org/>.

### **3.1 Relevance of Specific Human Rights to Climate Displacement:**

#### ***The Right to Life - Article 3 UDHR; Article 6 ICCPR***

Climate change poses direct and foreseeable threats to life through extreme heat, floods, storms, and sea-level rise. Under international law, states have both *negative obligations* to refrain from actions that endanger life and *positive obligations* to take reasonable preventive measures. The *Teitiota v. New Zealand*<sup>218</sup> decision by the UN Human Rights Committee was a milestone, affirming that returning individuals to areas rendered uninhabitable by climate impacts could amount to a violation of the right to life.

#### **The Right to Adequate Housing - Article 25 UDHR; Article 11 ICESCR**

Displacement often results in loss of housing or relocation to unsafe and inadequate settlements. States must ensure access to safe, habitable, and climate-resilient housing. Planned relocation and disaster response programs must respect principles of participation, consent, and non-discrimination, especially for vulnerable populations.

#### **The Right to Asylum and Protection - Article 14 UDHR**

Although Article 14 recognizes the right to seek asylum, it is non-binding and fails to address displacement caused by environmental factors. Because the 1951 Refugee Convention does not extend to those fleeing climate-related harm, there remains a critical protection gap. This lacuna highlights the need to either reinterpret existing legal instruments or develop new international frameworks explicitly addressing climate-induced migration.

#### **The Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination - Article 2 UDHR; Articles 2 & 26 ICCPR**

Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting low-income communities, women, Indigenous peoples, and small island nations. International human rights law mandates equal protection and special measures to safeguard at-risk groups, ensuring that the burdens of climate impacts do not fall inequitably on the most vulnerable.

#### **The Right to Participation - Article 21 UDHR; Article 25 ICCPR**

A rights-based approach requires that communities affected by climate impacts be active participants in decisions concerning relocation, adaptation, and

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<sup>218</sup> *Teitiota v. New Zealand*, Communication No. 2728/2016, U.N. Human Rights Committee, Views adopted on 7 January 2020.

rehabilitation. Inclusive decision-making ensures fairness, legitimacy, and sustainability in climate governance and policy design.

### **The Right to Water, Food, and Health - Articles 11 & 12 ICESCR**

Climate change disrupts access to essential resources, including clean water, adequate food, and healthcare. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) interprets these entitlements as integral components of the right to an adequate standard of living, obliging states to take measures to mitigate and adapt to environmental degradation to ensure the fulfillment of these rights.

### **3.2 Soft Law and Emerging Norms:**

In the absence of explicit treaty-based recognition of climate displacement, soft law instruments play a vital interpretive and operational role.

- The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) extend protection to those displaced by natural disasters and affirm state obligations toward internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- The Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda (2015) provides policy guidance for addressing cross-border displacement due to disasters and climate change.
- The Platform on Disaster Displacement (2016–present) builds on this by fostering intergovernmental cooperation and practical implementation.
- The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) explicitly acknowledges climate change, environmental degradation, and disasters as drivers of human mobility.

Although these mechanisms are non-binding, they collectively signal a normative shift toward recognizing climate-induced displacement as a major human rights concern requiring proactive international response.

### **3.3 Extraterritorial Human Rights Obligations:**

Climate change is a transboundary phenomenon; emissions and environmental degradation in one country often cause harm in another. Accordingly, states are increasingly recognized as having extraterritorial obligations, the duties to ensure that their actions or omissions do not cause foreseeable harm beyond their borders. This principle was reaffirmed in the *Torres Strait Islanders v. Australia*<sup>219</sup> case, where the UN Human Rights Committee held that Australia's inadequate climate action violated the petitioners' rights to culture and family life. Such jurisprudence emphasizes that human rights obligations extend across borders when environmental harm has global or cross-territorial consequences.

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<sup>219</sup> *Torres Strait Islanders v. Australia*, Communication No. 3624/2019, U.N. Human Rights Committee, Views adopted on 22 September 2022.

### 3.4 IKS Perspective: Ethical Foundations of Human Rights and Ecology

From the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), these human rights principles resonate deeply with traditional ecological ethics. Ancient Indian thought recognizes a moral and spiritual duty to protect nature, captured in concepts like *Prakriti Dharma* (duty towards the environment), *Ahimsa* (non-violence toward all beings), and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world as one family). These values underscore the idea that human well-being and environmental balance are inseparable.

By integrating such indigenous wisdom into international discourse, we can enrich the human rights framework, transforming it from a purely legal construct into a moral commitment to planetary stewardship. This convergence of global human rights norms and Indian ecological philosophy reinforces the notion that protecting displaced persons is not just a humanitarian act but a moral obligation rooted in justice, compassion, and sustainability.

### 4. International Response to Climate Change

Climate is a natural and dynamic phenomenon; however, the accelerating pace of climate change is primarily a result of human activity, particularly industrial emissions, urban expansion, deforestation, and unsustainable resource consumption. As its devastating effects transcend borders, the global community has sought collective mechanisms to mitigate emissions, adapt to changing environments, and protect those most at risk.

The cornerstone of international climate cooperation is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), adopted in 1992. It represents the first major global effort to stabilize greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” The Convention emphasizes that climate change is a “common concern of humankind”, and it calls for common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), recognizing that while all states share a duty to act, developed countries bear a greater obligation due to their historical emissions.

Under this framework, both mitigation and adaptation became twin pillars of global response. Article 4.1(e) of the UNFCCC underscores the need for adaptation through technology transfer, capacity building, and sustainable development assistance. Mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) have since provided funding to developing nations, supporting initiatives like the Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change and similar regional programs that build resilience and reduce vulnerability.

Because climate change disregards national boundaries, multilateral cooperation is indispensable. Yet, its success depends largely on the political will, economic capacity, and policy coherence of individual states. The Conference of the Parties

(COP) serves as the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC, reviewing national progress and negotiating new commitments.

#### **4.1 Evolution of the International Climate Regime: From UNFCCC to Kyoto and Beyond**

The international climate regime has evolved through a sequence of treaties and cooperative instruments that progressively expanded commitments and institutional support. The UNFCCC, 1992, established the initial framework by articulating guiding principles such as the precautionary approach, the polluter-pays principle, and the promotion of sustainable development. Its goal was to stabilize GHG concentrations without undermining food production or economic growth.

Building on this, the Kyoto Protocol, 1997, introduced legally binding emission reduction targets for developed countries, averaging a 5% cut below 1990 levels during 2008–2012. It also created innovative market-based mechanisms such as Emissions Trading, Joint Implementation, and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) to promote cost-effective reductions and encourage technology transfer to developing states.

However, post-2012 negotiations exposed deep political divides, particularly among major emitters. The Montreal Conference, 2005, revitalized global discussions, eventually leading to the Paris Agreement, 2015, a landmark accord that shifted from top-down obligations to nationally determined contributions (NDCs), allowing each country to set its own targets in line with national capabilities.

The Paris Agreement also explicitly acknowledged the connection between climate change and human mobility, leading to the creation of the Task Force on Displacement under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. This was the first recognition within the UNFCCC framework that climate-induced displacement required coordinated policy and protection. However, the agreement remains non-binding, and its success depends heavily on state cooperation and domestic implementation.

Regional instruments have also begun to localize these global norms. For example, the Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change, 2014, in Africa emphasizes data collection, capacity building, and resource mobilization to manage environmentally induced migration. Similarly, initiatives in the Pacific Islands and South Asia highlight regional solidarity and climate resilience. Nevertheless, these remain limited in scope and enforceability, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, binding international legal framework for climate-displaced persons.

Parallel to formal treaties, voluntary and non-state initiatives, such as the WWF Climate Savers Programme, the Pew Center Business Council, and corporate carbon disclosure programs, have mobilized business and civil society toward climate accountability.

#### 4.2 Small Island States: The Frontline of Climate Vulnerability

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as Kiribati, the Maldives, the Bahamas, and the Marshall Islands represent the most acutely vulnerable regions on Earth. Much of their landmass lies barely three to four meters above sea level, making them susceptible to inundation, saline intrusion, and ecosystem collapse. Tourism, which constitutes a significant portion of their GDP, often exceeding 50%, faces existential threats as coral reefs degrade and coastlines erode. Rising seas and intensified storms jeopardize infrastructure, water resources, and livelihoods. Without effective global mitigation, these nations may face not only economic ruin but also cultural extinction and statelessness, raising unprecedented human rights and sovereignty questions under international law. The plight of SIDS highlights that climate change is not just an environmental crisis but a justice issue, wherein those least responsible for emissions suffer the gravest consequences.

**Table 4.3: Sources of Funds and Institutional Support for Addressing Climate-Induced Displacement**

Source / Mechanism	Establishment / Framework	Primary Objective	Relevance to Climate Displacement
<b>Green Climate Fund (GCF)</b>	Established under the UNFCCC (2010)	To finance mitigation and adaptation projects in developing countries	Provides financial support for climate-resilient infrastructure and national adaptation strategies, helping reduce displacement risks. <sup>220</sup>
<b>Adaptation Fund (AF)</b>	Created under the Kyoto Protocol (2001)	To fund concrete adaptation programs and projects in vulnerable regions	Strengthens adaptive capacity and community resilience, thereby reducing vulnerability to forced migration.

<sup>220</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *Green Climate Fund: Overview and Mandate*, accessed October 2025, <https://www.greenclimate.fund>

<b>Source / Mechanism</b>	<b>Establishment / Framework</b>	<b>Primary Objective</b>	<b>Relevance to Climate Displacement</b>
<b>Global Environment Facility (GEF)</b>	Launched in 1991 as a multilateral financing mechanism	To promote environmental sustainability and climate resilience	Supports projects addressing land degradation and biodiversity loss, major contributors to displacement.
<b>Loss and Damage Fund</b>	Established under the UNFCCC at COP27 (2022)	To compensate developing countries for irreversible climate impacts	Finances recovery, relocation, and rehabilitation efforts for communities displaced by severe climate events.
<b>World Bank &amp; Regional Development Banks</b>	Independent international financial institutions	To provide concessional loans and grants for climate and disaster resilience	Support adaptive infrastructure, disaster preparedness, and livelihood protection for at-risk populations.
<b>UN Agencies (UNHCR, IOM, UNDP)</b>	Humanitarian and development arms of the United Nations system	To protect and assist persons affected by disasters and displacement	Deliver emergency relief, rehabilitation, and long-term resilience-building programs.
<b>Bilateral and Multilateral Aid</b>	Country-led cooperation mechanisms	To provide targeted climate finance and technical assistance	Facilitate national adaptation and migration-resilience initiatives, especially in vulnerable developing states and SIDS.
<b>National Climate and Disaster Funds</b>	Domestic mechanisms established by individual countries	To implement local adaptation and disaster management policies	Finance programs addressing internal displacement, recovery, and risk reduction at the community level.
<b>Private Sector &amp; Philanthropic Initiatives</b>	Independent or collaborative financing mechanisms	To invest in sustainable and innovative climate projects	Complement public funding through technology innovation, green

Source / Mechanism	Establishment / Framework	Primary Objective	Relevance to Climate Displacement
<b>Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)</b>	Independent civil society institutions	To advocate for rights and implement humanitarian and resilience programs	finance, and community resilience projects. Act as key actors in field-level adaptation, awareness campaigns, and rights-based protection of displaced persons <sup>221</sup> .

*Compiled from reports of the UNFCCC, World Bank, Adaptation Fund, and NGO climate resilience programs (2023–2024)*

#### **4.4 IKS Perspective: Integrating Ethical Ecology into Global Governance**

From the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), addressing climate change demands not just technological advancement but a moral and spiritual reorientation. Ancient Indian philosophy perceives humanity and nature as interdependent elements of one cosmic order. Principles like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (“the world is one family”), Prakriti Dharma, and Ahimsa advocate restraint, compassion, and collective responsibility—values echoing the ethical foundation of modern climate governance. Embedding such indigenous wisdom into global frameworks can lend ethical depth and cultural continuity to climate policy. India’s traditional practices, sacred groves, community forestry, and water conservation offer models of sustainable coexistence. A future-oriented climate regime must therefore merge scientific innovation with ecological ethics, ensuring that human progress advances in harmony with planetary well-being.

#### **5. The impact of Climate Change on India’s Environment and Society: a Human Rights Perspective:**

India ranks among the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world, facing profound threats that extend beyond environmental degradation to touch the very core of human rights and constitutional guarantees. The consequences of climate change are multidimensional, affecting water security, food systems, public health, housing, and livelihoods, particularly for the poor, agrarian, and coastal communities. From the Himalayan glaciers in the north to the deltaic plains and

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<sup>221</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *Decisions Adopted at COP27: Establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund*, Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022.  
World Bank, *Climate Change Action Plan 2021–2025: Supporting Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development*, Washington, D.C., 2021.

coastal belts in the south, the manifestations of climate change are already visible. These transformations jeopardize several fundamental rights recognized both under international human rights law and the Indian Constitution, especially Article 21, which guarantees the *right to life and personal liberty*. The Supreme Court of India has expansively interpreted Article 21 to include the *right to a clean and healthy environment*, the *right to livelihood*, and the *right to water and shelter*. Hence, environmental degradation and climate inaction can be construed as violations of this constitutional right.

### **Melting Glaciers and Threatened Water Security**

The rapid retreat of Himalayan glaciers, the largest ice reserves outside the poles, threatens India's freshwater lifelines, including the Ganga, Yamuna, and Brahmaputra. Continued recession may trigger floods followed by severe scarcity, endangering food security and rural livelihoods. Communities across Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, and Assam depend on these rivers; their depletion would violate the right to water and livelihood, protected under Article 21 and Article 48-A of the Constitution, and under Article 11 of the ICESCR.

### **Altered Monsoon Patterns and Agrarian Distress**

Climate change has disrupted India's traditional monsoon system, making rainfall erratic and unpredictable. Irregular rainfall patterns, combined with prolonged droughts, threaten the agrarian economy that sustains nearly half the population. Crop failures, declining soil fertility, and water shortages have deepened rural poverty and distress migration. The Indian judiciary has reaffirmed in cases such as *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, 1985, and *Chameli Singh v. State of U.P.*, 1996. These judgments collectively affirm that the right to life encompasses not only physical existence but also the conditions that make life meaningful and dignified, including access to sustenance, housing, and environmental security.

### **Rising Temperatures, Health, and Gender Dimensions**

Projected temperature increases of 3-5 °C by 2100 pose severe health risks, from heatwaves and air pollution to the spread of vector-borne diseases. These burdens fall disproportionately on the poor, slum dwellers, and outdoor workers, and are compounded by gender inequality as women shoulder greater caregiving and water-collection responsibilities. The right to health, recognized under Article 12 ICESCR and within Article 21 (*Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India*, 1995), is thus deeply intertwined with climate resilience.

### **Sea-Level Rise and Coastal Vulnerability**

India's extensive coastline spanning over 7,500 kilometers faces increasing threats from sea-level rise, saline intrusion, and intensified cyclones. Coastal megacities like Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata are particularly at risk of partial submersion

and infrastructure collapse. Rural coastal zones, especially the Sundarbans delta, are witnessing salinization of soil, agricultural loss, and forced displacement. Such displacement erodes housing, property, and cultural rights, all integral to the right to life and dignity. The absence of formal legal recognition for *climate-displaced persons* further aggravates their vulnerability. The Indian judiciary, through cases like *Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar*, 1991, and *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India*, 1996, has underscored that a clean environment is part of Article 21, and that the “precautionary” and “polluter pays” principles are intrinsic to sustainable development.

### **Agricultural and Livelihood Impacts**

Unpredictable monsoons, rising soil salinity, and depletion of groundwater have reduced agricultural productivity. Farmers dependent on rain-fed crops and traditional irrigation face declining incomes and food insecurity. The right to livelihood, as part of Article 21, becomes directly implicated when climate change undermines agrarian survival. Additionally, rural women and marginalized groups, who depend heavily on natural resources for sustenance, face deeper hardships due to gendered inequalities in land ownership and access to resources. Protecting their rights requires integrating climate adaptation with social justice, a core element of both international human rights and the Indian Knowledge System's ethics of inclusivity (*Sarvodaya*—the welfare of all).

### **Human Health, Ecosystems, and the IKS Connection**

Rising temperatures, deforestation, and pollution aggravate public health burdens and erode ecological stability. The loss of biodiversity in the Western Ghats, degradation of mangroves in the Sundarbans, and coral bleaching along India's coasts threaten both human survival and natural heritage. Incorporating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into environmental governance offers valuable insights. Ancient Indian environmental philosophy, rooted in *Prakriti Dharma* (duty toward nature), *Ahimsa* (non-violence toward all beings), and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world as one family), emphasizes coexistence, balance, and reverence for the Earth. These principles align with the human rights-based approach to sustainability, reinforcing that protecting nature is integral to protecting human dignity. Traditional Indian practices such as rainwater harvesting, sacred groves (Devaranya), crop diversification, and community forestry embody this ecological wisdom. They demonstrate that local resilience and global climate adaptation can thrive together when guided by ethical and cultural responsibility.

### **5.1 UNHCR Guidelines and Recent International Developments**

The UNHCR now acknowledges the nexus between climate change, displacement, and human rights. Its Climate Change, Displacement and Human Rights Factsheet, 2022, and Policy on Climate Action and Displacement, 2023, urge states to integrate climate risks into asylum systems and adopt durable, rights-based

solutions. The flagship report *No Escape: On the Frontlines of Climate Change, Conflict and Forced Displacement*, 2024, led to the creation of a Climate Resilience Fund and a Strategic Plan for Climate Action (2024–2030).

While these advances remain non-binding, they underscore the human-rights basis for protection. The International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion (2025) strengthened this link, declaring that states have binding duties to prevent and remedy climate-related harm and that inaction may constitute an internationally wrongful act. This opinion gives normative weight to treating climate displacement as a legal, not merely humanitarian concern.

## **5.2 Challenges in Implementation:**

### **Despite normative progress, key obstacles persist:**

- Lack of legal recognition for climate-displaced persons as a protected category.
- Jurisdictional and enforcement gaps within existing human-rights treaties.
- Political reluctance to expand asylum definitions or adopt new obligations.
- Financial constraints, funds like the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Loss and Damage Fund, remain under-resourced and focused on mitigation rather than rehabilitation.
- Political resistance to expanding ‘Asylum’ definitions or establishing new protection obligations faces opposition from some states.
- Individuals displaced due to climate change are not formally recognized as “refugees”, as the term is reserved under the 1951 Refugee Convention for those fleeing persecution based on specific grounds.
- Most persons displaced by climate impacts do not cross international borders; rather, they remain within the territorial boundaries of their own state.
- Consequently, such individuals do not qualify for refugee status under international law, nor do they fully enjoy protection or assistance under their respective domestic legal frameworks.

## **6. Conclusion & Suggestions**

Addressing climate-induced displacement requires a shift from reactive humanitarian aid to proactive global governance, legal recognition, and ethical responsibility. The issue is not merely environmental but a profound human-rights and justice challenge, engaging both international and constitutional obligations.

### **The Key Priorities are:**

- Creating a legal framework, by developing a binding international protocol under the UNFCCC or Refugee Convention to protect *climate-displaced persons (CDPs)*, ensuring their rights to life, dignity, and safe resettlement, consistent with the 2025 ICJ Advisory Opinion affirming States’ duties to prevent and remedy climate harm.

- Practicing preventive adaptation, investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, early warning systems, and livelihood diversification to reduce the need for forced migration and enhance community adaptability.
- Climate justice and accountability, by holding major emitting States legally and morally responsible for financing loss-and-damage mechanisms, rehabilitation, and capacity-building in vulnerable regions.
- Bridging legal gaps by formulating coherent international guidelines that integrate the refugee, human-rights, and climate regimes to ensure holistic protection for displaced populations.
- Equitable financing by strengthening the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and Loss & Damage Fund to guarantee timely, transparent, and equitable financial support for relocation, rehabilitation, and resilience-building.
- Inclusive policymaking by incorporating the voices of displaced persons, indigenous communities, and local stakeholders through participatory governance, evidence-based planning, and cross-border cooperation.
- IKS and Ethical Ecology by reconnecting with India's traditional ecological wisdom Prakriti Dharma (duty toward nature), Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family), and Sarvodaya (universal welfare) to guide ethics-driven, sustainable governance rooted in balance and coexistence.

Framing climate-induced displacement as a human-rights obligation transforms it from a matter of humanitarian relief to one of State accountability. Under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, the right to life extends to a healthy environment and secure livelihood rights now endangered by climate change.

By aligning international law, regional cooperation, and IKS-based ecological ethics, India and the global community can forge a future where climate-induced displacement is addressed not with charity, but with justice, dignity, and sustainability.

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## 14.

# The Dharma of Dialogue: India's Traditional Path to ADR

**Dr. K. Pallavi**

*Assistant Professor,  
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar College of Law,  
Andhra University.*

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### **Abstract**

*The concept of Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) in India transcends its modern procedural designation; it represents a profound and enduring synthesis of ancient heritage and contemporary legal necessity. Rooted deeply in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), mechanisms for reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration have demonstrated remarkable cultural continuity and legal evolution across millennia. This comprehensive chapter meticulously traces the ingestion, continuity, and formal institutionalization of these principles within the IKS, arguing for its precise conceptualization as Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR), a mechanism inherently suited to the civilizational ethos of dharma and sama. The historical analysis commences with seminal mythological instances, such as Lord Krishna's mediation in the Mahabharata, proceeds through the sophisticated Dharmasāstric prescriptions for community-based conflict resolution and the pragmatic statecraft of Kautilya, and culminates in the contemporary statutory landscape, notably the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 and the landmark Mediation Act, 2023. By critically analyzing these developments, the paper illuminates how the ancient ideals of dharma (righteousness), sama (conciliation/equilibrium), and ahimsa (non-violence) inform the philosophical, ethical, and sociological foundations of modern ADR practices. The study ultimately posits that India's ADR tradition embodies not just procedural expediency and access to justice, but a profound civilizational commitment to social harmony, positioning it as the most appropriate method of conflict resolution for a pluralistic society.*

### **Introduction: The Indigenous Foundations of Appropriate Dispute Resolution**

Dispute resolution is not a peripheral administrative function but has been an integral element of India's civilizational evolution. While modern legal frameworks, predominantly influenced by the adversarial system introduced during the colonial period, emphasize codified, courtroom-centric procedures, India's indigenous approaches have historically relied upon a robust framework of moral, social, and spiritual principles. This contrasts sharply with the often-binary, winner-takes-all outcome of adversarial litigation. The inherent preference for amicable settlement is deeply embedded in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which encompasses a wide array of traditions—from scriptural and

philosophical texts to customary and communal practices—that have codified mechanisms for reconciliation and peace.

The present research undertakes an extensive analytical journey across various epochs— mythological, Vedic, classical, medieval, colonial, and post-independence—to systematically demonstrate the unbroken thread of ADR principles woven into India’s legal and cultural fabric. The sustained presence, evolution, and eventual legislative re- affirmation of these non-litigious methods confirm a critical premise: that ADR in the Indian context is conceptually misclassified as a mere "alternative" to the formal court system. Instead, it is the historically, culturally, and ethically Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism, optimally aligned with the fundamental societal goal of achieving and maintaining *sama* (social equilibrium). This repositioning from 'Alternative' to 'Appropriate' is essential to understanding the unique trajectory of dispute resolution in India.

### **ADR in Mythological and Epic Literature: The Moral Mandate of Conciliation**

The mythological and epic narratives of India, contained within the Itihasas like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, establish mediation and conciliation not merely as practical tools, but as essential virtues of *dharma* (moral, ethical, and righteous duty). These foundational texts articulate the moral imperative for leadership to exhaust all avenues of peace before resorting to war or adversarial judgment.

The Mahabharata provides the most powerful and frequently cited illustration of high-stakes mediation through the role of Lord Krishna. His diplomatic mission to the court of the Kauravas to avert the catastrophic war serves as a paradigmatic instance of pre-litigation peacebuilding through dialogue. Krishna’s negotiation, where he sought even a minimal compromise—specifically, five villages for the Pandavas—demonstrated a tireless commitment to finding a mutually acceptable settlement. His method was not coercive but persuasive, focusing on the principles of justice and righteousness that transcended political differences. This narrative illustrates that true governance involves the active pursuit of reconciliation, setting a precedent for state-sponsored conciliation.

Similarly, the Ramayana reflects early tendencies toward consensus-based resolution. Sages such as Vashistha and Vishwamitra often acted as revered intermediaries and counsellors, advising rulers to seek harmony rather than confrontation. Their spiritual and moral authority often transcended temporal royal power, making their recommendations highly effective in de-escalating conflicts. These narratives reveal that a consensus-oriented approach to dispute resolution was integral to governance and the maintenance of moral order long before the establishment of formal, bureaucratized courts. The message is clear: the appropriate first step in any conflict is reasoned dialogue and compromise.

## **ADR in the Vedic and Dharmaśāstric Corpus: Institutionalizing Restorative Justice**

The transition from the epic age to the Vedic and post-Vedic periods saw the principles of conciliation being formalized and institutionalized through collective bodies, thereby embedding the concept of appropriate resolution within the legal structure.

### **The Vedic Assemblies**

Early Vedic literature describes communal institutions that served as proto-deliberative and dispute-resolving forums:

**Sabha and Samiti:** These assemblies were foundational institutions where matters of communal interest, including disputes, were discussed and settled through collective deliberation and consensus. This system relied on the authority of community wisdom rather than the coercive power of a state functionary.

### **The Dharmaśāstric Framework**

The subsequent Dharmaśāstras (classical legal and ethical treatises, such as Manusmriti, Yājñavalkya Smṛiti, and Narada Smṛiti) formally recognized and structured sub-state dispute resolution bodies, establishing a sophisticated system of legal pluralism.

### **The authority of these community-based bodies was derived from social custom and ethical prescription:**

**Kula (Family):** Resolution of disputes within the kinship group.

**Sreni (Guild):** Resolution of disputes within professional or trade associations.

**Puga (Association):** Resolution of disputes within general local associations.

These texts emphatically mandated conciliation (*sama*) as the preferred method to be exhausted before formal state adjudication. Narada Smṛiti and Yājñavalkya Smṛiti, for example, detail the specific steps to be taken for conciliation, indicating that only when these communal and conciliatory methods failed would the matter proceed to the *Prādvivāka* (the official adjudicator). Justice in these systems was profoundly restorative; the goal was not merely to assign guilt but to reintegrate the wrongdoer and mend the severed social ties, underscoring the civilizational commitment to social harmony and confirming their function as appropriate dispute mechanisms.

### **ADR in Classical Political Thought and Kautilya's Arthashastra: The Statecraft of Settlement**

Kautilya's Arthashastra (c. 4th–3rd century BCE), a seminal and extraordinarily sophisticated treatise on political science, economics, and statecraft, incorporated dispute resolution as a critical, efficiency-driven element of judicial administration. Kautilya recognized that an overly centralized judicial system

would strain state resources and public goodwill, necessitating decentralized, efficient alternatives.

The text differentiated between the formal royal courts (dharmasthiya for civil law and kantaka shodana for penal law) and local bodies. Critically, Kautilya explicitly advocated for and recognized arbitration and mediation as efficient means to maintain order and dispense justice. The Arthashastra thus formalized the indigenous principle by advocating for the settlement of disputes through negotiation and compromise before escalating to state litigation. This established a foundational model of legal pluralism that balanced the authority of the central state with the functional autonomy of communal bodies.

The quasi-judicial role of Merchant Guilds (Shrenis) further illustrates Kautilya's pragmatic approach. These commercial associations possessed the authority to resolve disputes among their members using their own customs and mechanisms, particularly concerning trade and contract enforcement. This established a robust, specialized, and efficient system of commercial arbitration, which significantly expedited economic justice and served as a direct precursor to modern commercial arbitration practices. Kautilya's work confirms that non-adversarial, specialized systems were recognized at the highest level of state planning as the appropriate recourse for ensuring commercial stability.

### **ADR in the Medieval Period: Pluralism, Panchayat, and Sulh**

The medieval era introduced a new layer of complexity to India's legal landscape, characterized by pronounced legal and administrative plurality. The persistence of indigenous ADR mechanisms during this period highlights their deep cultural resilience.

While the arrival of Islamic rule introduced the formal, state-backed Qazi system—a system of adjudication—the Hindu and diverse customary practices of dispute resolution continued to operate vigorously at the local level. The Panchayat system—the council of village elders—remained the central pillar of grassroots justice. The Panchayat's strength lay in its intimate knowledge of local contexts, customs, and the parties involved, enabling it to craft solutions that emphasized social reintegration and lasting harmony rather than punitive measures.

Despite the superimposition of diverse religious and political frameworks, the underlying cultural emphasis remained consistent across communities: a preference for compromise (sulh) and the maintenance of community harmony. The concept of sulh in Islamic jurisprudence, which emphasizes amicable settlement, harmonized philosophically with the pre-existing IKS principles of sama and ahimsa. Furthermore, Sufi traditions of reconciliation often played a role in dispute settlement, effectively blending spiritual and legal principles to broker peace and communal cohesion. The continuity of these decentralized, consensus-seeking mechanisms demonstrate their inherent appropriateness for the social structure of the time.

## **Colonial and Post-Independence Transformation: From Adversarial Imposition to Statutory Reaffirmation**

### **The Colonial Impact and Marginalization**

The establishment of the British colonial system had a disruptive and profound effect, systematically introducing and prioritizing adversarial procedures based on the common law system. This shift marginalized and slowly eroded the indigenous, consensus-based forms of ADR. The emphasis moved from community restoration to technical legal interpretation and litigation.

Despite this adversarial imposition, the practicality of non-court resolution persisted, leading to a grudging statutory recognition, primarily in the commercial sphere. The Indian Arbitration Act of 1899 laid the early statutory foundations for arbitration in India, though its application was largely confined to commercial matters in major presidencies.

#### **a) The Post-Independence Reassertion of Justice**

Following India's independence, there was a concerted effort to recalibrate the justice delivery system to align with democratic and constitutional ideals of access and equity. This vision provided the necessary momentum to revitalize indigenous ADR principles.

**b) Constitutional Mandate (Article 39A):** This pivotal Directive Principle of State Policy promotes equal justice and free legal aid. The state's obligation to provide accessible justice is fundamentally served by promoting ADR, which is often faster and less expensive than traditional litigation.

**c) Procedural Mandate (Section 89 CPC):** The introduction of Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (as amended in 1999), was a watershed moment. This provision explicitly mandates the court to identify elements of settlement and refer the parties to four designated ADR mechanisms: arbitration, conciliation, judicial settlement, or mediation. This move fundamentally reclassified ADR from a voluntary appendage to a legally sanctioned and mandatory preliminary step—the appropriate first recourse in judicial proceedings.

### **Modern Statutory Institutionalization**

The subsequent legislative efforts fully institutionalized key ADR processes:

**The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996:** This comprehensive legislation, modeled on the UNCITRAL Model Law and Rules, unified and modernized both domestic and international commercial arbitration standards, ensuring enforceability and predictability. It also gave statutory recognition to conciliation as a distinct, voluntary process.

**The Mediation Act, 2023:** This landmark legislation finally elevates mediation to a standalone statutory process. It not only institutionalizes mediation but introduces key features such as pre-litigation mediation, mandatory referral provisions, and provisions for the enforceability of mediated settlement

agreements. By emphasizing voluntariness, confidentiality, and enforceability, the Act formally recognizes mediation as an essential, high-quality, and appropriate component of India's justice delivery architecture.

### **Continuity and Philosophical Foundations: ADR as Sama and Ahimsa**

The modern legislative embrace of ADR is best understood not as a replication of global trends, but as a self-conscious re-engagement with the foundational philosophical essence of the IKS. The enduring relevance of the ancient system lies in its philosophical moorings, which underpin the concept of Appropriate

#### **Dispute Resolution:**

- **Dharma and Ethics:** Conflict resolution is viewed as an ethical obligation under the principle of dharma, aimed at restoring cosmic and social order. It transcends a mere procedural exercise to determine fault.
- **Ahimsa and Dialogue:** The principle of ahimsa (non-violence) inherently guides the process toward peaceful, non-adversarial dialogue (sama) rather than the legal violence of aggressive confrontation.
- **Restoration over Retribution:** The ultimate goal is sama (equilibrium or balance), meaning the resolution must be restorative and future-oriented, enabling parties to coexist in harmony.

Modern ADR, though articulated in contemporary legal terminology, retains these underlying principles. High-level judicial pronouncements have affirmed this continuity, with senior judges often referring explicitly to the history of Krishna's mediation or the pragmatic success of village panchayats to underscore the indigenous nature of amicable settlement.

The convergence of these spiritual, ethical, and pragmatic dimensions fundamentally distinguishes Indian ADR. It is not solely a contractual arrangement between parties, but a means to re-establish social order, making it the most appropriate dispute resolution model for a society that values community harmony above individual legal victory. The ingestion of ADR principles is thus a continuous thread, demonstrating an enduring synthesis of moral philosophy, social pragmatism, and procedural innovation.

### **Conclusion: ADR as India's Civilizational Commitment**

The journey of Alternate Dispute Resolution within the Indian Knowledge System is a powerful narrative of continuity and adaptation. From the diplomatic efforts detailed in the epics to the rigorous statutory framework of the Mediation Act, 2023, India's history illustrates that ADR is not a borrowed mechanism but a sophisticated rediscovery and institutionalization of its own indigenous traditions. The transition from 'Alternative' to 'Appropriate' Dispute Resolution is a necessary conceptual shift, reflecting the mechanism's historical precedence and its inherent suitability for India's socio-cultural context. By integrating the ethical, cultural,

and sociological insights of its knowledge system, India ensures that its justice delivery system remains not only efficient and accessible, but also deeply humane, culturally resonant, and optimally designed to achieve the ultimate goal of justice as dharma. The enduring legacy of sama and ahimsa confirms that the quest for non-adversarial settlement remains India's abiding civilizational commitment.

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- Ingestion of Alternate Dispute Resolution in the Indian Knowledge System: A Historical and Doctrinal Analysis from Mythology to Modern Law (Abstract)
- Rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), mechanisms of reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration have evolved through various epochs—from the mythological and Vedic periods to the post-independence statutory framework.
- This paper traces the ingestion and continuity of ADR within the Indian Knowledge System, beginning with mythological instances such as Lord Krishna's mediation in the Mahabharata, extending through Dharmaśāstric prescriptions of community-based dispute resolution, and culminating in contemporary laws such as the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 and the Mediation Act, 2023.
- The study argues that India's ADR tradition embodies not only procedural convenience but also a civilizational commitment to social harmony and justice.
- Dispute resolution has been an integral part of the civilizational evolution of India.
- While modern legal frameworks emphasize codified procedures, India's indigenous approaches to resolving disputes have historically relied upon moral, social, and spiritual principles rather than adversarial litigation.
- The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses a wide array of traditions—from scriptural and philosophical to customary and communal—that embody mechanisms for reconciliation and peace.
- The present research paper undertakes an analytical journey across various epochs—mythological, Vedic, classical, medieval, colonial, and post independence—to demonstrate how ADR principles are woven into India's legal and cultural fabric.
- In the mythological and epic narratives of India, mediation and conciliation emerge as essential virtues of dharma.
- The Mahabharata provides perhaps the earliest illustration of mediation through Lord Krishna's diplomatic mission to avert war.
- Krishna's negotiation between the Pandavas and the Kauravas—wherein he sought even a minimal compromise of five villages—serves as a paradigmatic

instance of peacebuilding through dialogue. The Ramayana similarly reflects ADR tendencies.

- sages such as Vashistha and Vishwamitra often functioned as intermediaries who counselled rulers to seek harmony rather than confrontation.<sup>2</sup> These narratives reveal that consensus-oriented dispute resolution was integral to governance and moral order long before formal courts.
- The Vedic and post-Vedic periods institutionalized several bodies that resolved disputes through collective wisdom.
- Assemblies such as the Sabha and Samiti served as proto-deliberative forums.<sup>3</sup> Later Dharmaśāstras formalized this structure, mentioning the Kula (family), Sreni (guild), and Puga (association) as legitimate dispute-resolving bodies.
- Kautilya's Arthashastra, a seminal work on governance and statecraft, codified dispute resolution as part of judicial administration.
- It distinguished between royal courts and local bodies while recognizing arbitration and mediation as efficient means to maintain order. The Arthashastra advocates settlement through negotiation and compromise before resorting to litigation, reflecting an early legal pluralism that balances state authority with communal autonomy.
- Merchant guilds (Shrenis) acted as quasi-judicial entities for commercial disputes, a precursor to modern commercial arbitration.
- During the medieval era, India's legal landscape was characterized by plurality.
- Islamic jurisprudence introduced the Qazi system, while Hindu and customary practices persisted in local adjudication.
- Panchayats remained central to village dispute resolution. Despite diverse religious frameworks, the underlying emphasis remained on compromise (sulh) and community harmony.
- The British colonial system introduced adversarial procedures that marginalized indigenous forms of ADR.
- Nevertheless, statutory arbitration began to find recognition in 19th-century legislation.
- The Indian Arbitration Act of 1899 laid early foundations, though largely confined to commercial matters.
- After independence, India reasserted its commitment to accessible justice. Article 39A of the Constitution promotes equal access to justice, and Section 89 of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC) explicitly endorses settlement through ADR mechanisms. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, modeled on the UNCITRAL framework, unified domestic and international arbitration standards. The Mediation Act, 2023 further institutionalizes mediation as a standalone process, emphasizing voluntariness, confidentiality, and enforceability.

- The philosophical essence of ADR in India rests upon dharma (moral duty), ahimsa (non-violence), and sama (equilibrium).
- Conflict resolution was not merely a procedural exercise but an ethical obligation aimed at restoring cosmic and social balance.
- Modern ADR, though couched in legal language, retains these underlying principles.
- Judicial references to Krishna’s mediation or village panchayats affirm this continuity.
- The ingestion of Alternate Dispute Resolution within the Indian Knowledge System represents an enduring synthesis of moral philosophy, social pragmatism, and procedural innovation.
- From the epics to the Mediation Act, 2023, India’s journey illustrates that ADR is not a borrowed mechanism but a rediscovery of its own traditions.
- As India continues to modernize its justice delivery, integrating the ethical and cultural insights of its knowledge system ensures that ADR remains not only efficient but also deeply humane.
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## Dharma as the Cornerstone of Justice in Classical Indian Legal System

**Dr. Nitin**

*Professor, Professor, Maharaja Agrasen, School of Law, Maharaja Agrasen University, Atal, Shiksha Kunj, Kalujhanda, District Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India; E-Mail nitinlasta@gmail.com Mobile- 9459265268*

**Dr. Shruti Dahiya**

*Assistant Professor, Amity Law School, Amity University, Mohali, Punjab. sdahiya@pb.amity.edu, 9050255515*

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### Abstract

*Dharma has a fundamental and multifaceted function in the traditional Indian legal system as the tenet that supports the idea of justice (Nyaya). Indian jurisprudence sees Dharma as an all-encompassing framework that controls cosmic, societal, and human order rather than only as a religious or ethical code, in contrast to the Western legal tradition, which frequently separates law from morality. The Shruti (Vedas), Smriti (Dharamsutras and Dharamshashtras), Arthashastra, Ramayana, and Mahabharata are among the ancient Indian books that examine the philosophical, pragmatic, and jurisprudential aspects of Dharma as the foundation of justice. In these scriptures, Dharma is presented as dynamic and contextual, with a focus on responsibility, righteousness, and harmony as opposed to strict legalism. The idea encompasses a wider moral duty towards society and the universe, going beyond simple legal requirements. It gives monarchs, judges, and people normative guidance so that justice is in line with moral and spiritual principles rather than being reduced to formal law. The king and the judicial institutions were responsible for interpreting and applying Dharma in settling conflicts, frequently taking into account fairness, social mores, and the spiritual well-being of the parties. By combining the rule of law with ethical and philosophical precepts, this pluralistic and comprehensive approach exposes a system where justice seeks to strike a balance between society's welfare and individual rights. This paper makes the case that the Indian legal tradition provides a special framework in which Dharma unites justice and the law. By doing this, it offers a timeless framework for modern legal theory that aims to re-establish the moral underpinnings of legal institutions. Critical insights into contemporary discussions of justice, legitimacy, and the moral function of law in society can be gained by re-examining Dharma-centric jurisprudence.*

**Keywords:** *Dharma, Justice, Classical Indian system, Legal Tradition, Moral Jurisprudence, Rajdharma.*

## Introduction

Since ancient times, the ethical, social, and legal underpinnings of Indian civilization have been shaped by the idea of Dharma. Originating from the Sanskrit root "*dhr*," which means "to sustain" or "to hold together," Dharma represents the cosmic order that supports the cosmos, society, and human behavior. In its broadest definition, dharma integrates moral, spiritual, and legal aspects into a single, comprehensive framework by embodying righteousness, duty, law, and justice. It is a guiding concept that guarantees balance between individual conduct and the general welfare of society, not just a set of regulations.<sup>1</sup>

Dharma was first connected to *ṛta*, the universal order that governs both natural and moral law, during the Vedic era. According to the Rigveda, *ṛta* is the cosmic rhythm that keeps the universe in balance, and following it was considered necessary for both divine and human behavior. Dharma developed over time to include moral obligations and social duties, serving as the normative basis for both individual and group existence. As a result, it became more than just a legal requirement; it became a way of life based on equality, justice, and truth.<sup>2</sup>

As the primary source of law in classical Indian jurisprudence, *Dharma* assumed a more codified form in the *Dharmasutras* and *Dharmasastras*. The concepts of *Dharma* were methodically developed in texts like the *Manusmṛiti*, *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti*, and *Narada Smṛiti* to govern civil, criminal, and procedural law. By fusing moral philosophy with legal reasoning, these texts acknowledged Dharma as the ultimate standard of moral behavior (*sadacara*) and legal validity. Therefore, law (*vyavahara*) was an expression of Dharma rather than a separate entity, guaranteeing the attainment of justice (*nyaya*) via moral behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

The comprehension of *Dharma* is further enhanced by the *Kautiliya Arthashastra*. It recognizes that the king must rule in accordance with Dharma to preserve legitimacy and order, even if it is largely a treatise on polity and statecraft. Although Kautilya makes a distinction between Dharma and *dandaniti* (the science of punishment), he maintains that both must function in harmony to maintain social harmony. Therefore, rather than being a tool of coercion, the law was intended to be a tool of moral order.<sup>4</sup> The idea of Dharma was further developed by Indian philosophical systems, especially *Mīmāṃsā* and *Vedānta*, which emphasized its ethical and epistemological aspects. Dharma, according to *Mīmāṃsā* scholars like Jaimini, is that which is prescribed by the Vedas, made known by holy precepts,

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<sup>1</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra- Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. I., 1930), 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> Anantasri Boddupalli and Raghava S. Boddupalli, "Vedic Wisdom of *Ṛta*, The Cosmic Law: Its Significance in Human Life" 3, No. 1, (2023): 33-39

<sup>3</sup> Lingat, Robert. *The Classical Law of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 9–14.

<sup>4</sup> R. P. Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthashastra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960), 5–10

and attained by deeds. This method of interpretation gave Dharma a transcendental authority that went beyond temporal laws by tying religious duty to moral and legal duty.<sup>5</sup>

In the Indian legal system, dharma cannot be boiled down to "law" in the meaning used in the West. It is an all-encompassing moral-legal system that incorporates responsibility, fairness, and righteousness. It envisions both the spiritual advancement of individuals as well as the governance of society. Dharma is therefore the cornerstone of Indian jurisprudence; it is a living ideal that balances legal order with moral philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

### **The King as the Enforcer of Dharma: Theory and Practice**

The king (*raja*) was considered the defender and enforcer of dharma, the moral and legal code that regulated social peace as well as individual behavior, in the classical Indian legal and political tradition. In addition to being political, the idea of kingship had deep ethical and religious roots, stemming from the cosmic notion of upholding *rta*, or the global order. The king is portrayed in the *Mahabharata* and the *Manusmṛti* as *dharmasya gopta* (the guardian of dharma), whose principal responsibility was to uphold justice via virtuous administration (*rajadharmā*). His power came from divine approval, but it was limited by dharma, which made it clear that even the sovereign was subject to morality.<sup>7</sup>

The *Manusmṛti* elaborates on the theoretical underpinnings of this ideal, stating that the king was created by the gods to safeguard the world against injustice and chaos.<sup>8</sup> According to the text, to maintain social order and sustain dharma, the king must exercise judgment when administering punishment (*daṇḍa*). Thus, the science of punishment, or *daṇḍaniti*, turns into a tool of dharma rather than just coercion. This is complemented by Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, which articulates the practical aspects of governance and counsels the ruler to maintain both moral order (dharma) and prosperity (*artha*).<sup>9</sup> Yet, the *Arthashastra* also reflects a tension between ethical idealism and political realism, portraying the king as a rational guardian who must at times employ strategic measures to secure stability, even when such acts verge on expedient rather than moral grounds.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jaimini, *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, trans. Ganganatha Jha (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1942), 1.1.2, . 5

<sup>6</sup> Werner Menski, *Hindu Law: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *King, Governance, and Law in Ancient India: Kautilya's Arthashastra* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 45

<sup>8</sup> *Manusmṛti*, VII.3–4, in G. Bühler (tr.), *The Laws of Manu* (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 25, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 237–239.

<sup>9</sup> Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthashastra*, 122

<sup>10</sup> Thomas R. Trautmann, *Kautilya and the Arthashastra: A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 88–90

By defining *rajadharma* as a sacred obligation, the *Mahabharata* expands on this notion, especially in the *Santi Parva*. It holds that kingship exists for the benefit of the populace (*praja-sukha*) and that the general welfare must always come before the ruler's own interests. When a ruler transgresses dharma, he invites disorder (adharma), which results in civil unrest and divine vengeance.<sup>11</sup> The epic also highlights that dharma is context-dependent and subtle (*sukṣma*), necessitating the wisdom and counsel of learned Brahmins and ministers to understand how to apply it in real-world situations. This emphasizes that dharma was a dynamic ethical framework that guided judicial and administrative acts rather than codified law in the contemporary sense.<sup>12</sup>

In reality, dharma enforcement meant that the king had to use a system of courts (*sabha* or *dharmasabha*) to administer justice, with the help of Brahmin judges, ministers, and jurists (*sabhyas*). The four sources of dharma—*sruti* (Vedas), *smṛiti* (tradition), *acara* (custom), and *atmatuṣṭi* (conscience)—should serve as the foundation for the king's decision, according to the Yajñavalkya *Smṛiti* and Narada *Smṛiti*, which outline comprehensive adjudication procedures.<sup>13</sup> In order to make sure that his decisions complied with societal and divine standards, the monarch was required to refer to these sources before rendering decisions. By prioritizing dharma over royal will, this institutionalization of moral order into judicial practice mirrored an early type of constitutional limitation.<sup>14</sup>

But ideal theory and historical practice frequently varied. Literary and epigraphic evidence from the Mauryan and Gupta periods indicates that kings often put economic interests and political stability ahead of strict adherence to scriptural dharma<sup>15</sup>. While maintaining dharma, the Mauryan emperor Asoka reinterpreted it as moral leadership that prioritized welfare, compassion, and tolerance over ceremonial orthodoxy<sup>16</sup>. Later rulers, such as the Guptas, on the other hand, portrayed themselves as defenders of *varṇasrama*-dharma in an attempt to gain legitimacy by adhering to Brahmanical principles. As a result, dharma enforcement changed to reflect shifting social and political contexts, striking a balance between practical statecraft and moral idealism.

In classical India, the monarch was seen as a political and moral leader, a defender of dharma whose legitimacy depended on his upholding of justice and

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<sup>11</sup> P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. III, 1946), 17–20.

<sup>12</sup> Alf Hillebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 212–214.

<sup>13</sup> Ram Sharan Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishing House, 1991), 105–107, 349–350

<sup>14</sup> Donald R. Davis Jr., *The Spirit of Hindu Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56–58.

<sup>15</sup> Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 150–153

<sup>16</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987), 92–95

righteousness. The ideal leader was a servant of dharma, obligated by sacred duty to protect the well-being of his subjects, rather than an autocrat. The intricate relationship between political need and moral obligation that defined ancient Indian ideas of justice and kingship is demonstrated by the fact that the practical realities of governing frequently required compromises between dharma and *artha*.<sup>17</sup>

### Judicial Procedure: Texts and Techniques

Ancient Indian judicial practice was a complex collection of books and methods that blended scriptural standards, knowledgeable (Sastra) commentary, and practical statecraft rather than a single codified system. Rules on jurisdiction, the types of proof that are admissible, oath and ordeal procedures, and the responsibilities of the king and judges were provided by the *Dharmasutras* and the *Smṛti* literature (exemplified by Manu and Yajñavalkya). These texts presented law as a component of dharma, thus connecting procedure to moral and ritual propriety. The Kautilya tradition, most notably the *Arthashastra*, regarded judicial work as a component of administrative method at the same time. It provided specific guidelines on evidence, the function of royal officers, inspection, and forensic inquiry, which frequently deviated from the Dharmic manuals in terms of tone and emphasis. The result is a legal culture in which sacred-law texts provided normative frames while political manuals supplied practical techniques for investigation and enforcement.<sup>18</sup>

Text and technique were equally important. The ancient texts control the sequence and weight of the several types of proof (*sabda*, or authoritative testimony; *acara*, or usage; *sakṣya*, or witness testimony; *soṣa*, or assay by ordeal, and direct evidence). Ritualized procedures are used to handle witnesses, documents, and ordeals. For example, the *Smṛti* manuals outline oath-formulae, rules for calling witnesses, and penalties for perjury; the *Arthashastra* adds guidelines for surveillance, cross-examination, and the use of agents to ensure the truth in cases where witnesses are not available. The same procedural repertoire was applied differently by village councils, royal courts, and itinerant royal commissioners based on social rank, economic stakes, and political exigencies, as evidenced by inscriptions and later commentarial literature.<sup>19</sup>

Two characteristics stand out in particular. First, there were multiple layers to the process: literary precedent, practical investigation, and ritual correctness all coexisted and might tug in various directions, creating uncertainty as well as flexibility. Therefore, prominent jurists and commentators (and later colonial

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<sup>17</sup> Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, *A Peep into the Early History of India- From the Foundation of the Maurya Dynasty to the Downfall of the Imperial Gupta Dynasty, (322 B.C—circa 500 A.C)* (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons, and Co., 1920)

<sup>18</sup> Sevanta Kalasappa, "Concept of Administration of Justice in Ancient India: An Analysis." *Indian Journal of Law and Human Behavior*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (January–June 2016): 35–40

<sup>19</sup> Kalasappa, "Concept of Administration of Justice in Ancient India: An Analysis", 35-40

administrators examining these sources) argued over whether a case should be decided by state necessity and practical equity or by canonical rule. Second, there was an obvious administrative imprint: the technical suggestions made by the *Arthashastra* (regarding hidden investigations, checks on fabricated witnesses, and calibrated punishments) show a clear concern for efficacy and deterrence, which complements the *Smṛtis'* moral discourse. Modern scholars, therefore, treat “judicial procedure” in ancient India not simply as a chapter in legal history, but as a meeting point of religious, social, and administrative logics — a plural, pragmatic system whose study rewards close reading of both the canonical texts and the practical manuals that shaped actual adjudication.<sup>20</sup>

### **Substantive Justice: Duties, Punishments, and Compensation**

Dharma, a multidimensional phrase that encompasses duty, morality, and law, was closely linked to the idea of justice in ancient India. Justice (*nyaya*) was a moral requirement that guided both individual and collective behavior, not just a legal concept. As foundational writings, the *dharma-sastras*, including the *Manu Smṛti*, *Yajñavalkya Smṛti*, and the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasutra*, outlined rights, obligations (*svadharma*), and the moral code for resolving conflicts and enforcing justice.<sup>21</sup>

The *dharma-sastras* stressed the significance of fulfilling one's assigned responsibilities according to one's caste (*varṇa*) and life stage (*asrama*). It was believed that these responsibilities were necessary to preserve social and cosmic order. The *Manu Smṛti*, for example, lays forth certain responsibilities for every *varṇa*, stating that people must behave according to their roles in order to maintain social peace. This philosophy emphasized the idea that justice depended on one's role and responsibilities within the social structure rather than being a universal ideal.<sup>22</sup>

In ancient India, punishments (*daṇḍa*) were seen as an essential tool for maintaining dharma and discouraging transgressions. A thorough description of several transgressions and their associated punishments, which range from fines to physical punishment, can be found in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya (Chanakya). The functions of the king and legal authorities in enforcing the law are also covered. *Prayascitta*, a type of atonement where people willingly attempted to right their wrongs, was a complement to the *daṇḍa* system and reflected the dual approach of corrective and punitive justice.<sup>23</sup> The ancient Indian legal system acknowledged the value of restitution and compensation in addition to punitive measures. In order

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<sup>20</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Essays in Classical and Modern Hindu Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 227-230

<sup>21</sup> Sevanta Kalasappa, "Concept of Administration of Justice in Ancient India: An Analysis", 35-40

<sup>22</sup> Anirban Pal, "Punishment, Implications, in 21st Century India", *International Journal of Judicial Law*, Volume: 01, Issue 04 (July-August 2022): 16-18

<sup>23</sup> Qadeer Alam, "Historical Overview of Torture and Inhuman Punishments in Indian Sub-continent", *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, Volume No. 31, Issue No. 2 (July - December 2018): 127-133

to ensure that justice was both punishing and restorative, offenders were frequently obliged to reimburse victims for the harm they had inflicted. By addressing both the victim's right to redress and the wrongdoer's need to make reparations, this strategy sought to balance the scales of justice. Dharma, which served as the moral basis for all legal doctrines and procedures, was central to ancient Indian justice. This is demonstrated by the Vasiṣṭha *Dharmasutra*, which emphasizes that justice and moral righteousness must coexist and lays forth obligations and moral behavior for both individuals and rulers. Justice was therefore a moral compass that led people and society toward moral behavior, rather than just a juridical framework.<sup>24</sup>

### **Dharma and Social Difference: Varṇa, Gender, and Legal Inequality**

The idea of dharma, or obligation or law, was essential to the organization of social roles and relationships in ancient Indian culture. The *varṇa* system, a hierarchical division of society into four main groups—Brahmins (priests and academics), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers), and Shudras (workers and service providers)—was closely associated with this structure. One of the most important *Dharmashastras*, the *Manusmriti*, outlines particular responsibilities and rights for every *varṇa*, claiming that upholding these roles is essential to maintaining societal order and cosmic harmony<sup>25</sup>.

But the *Varṇa* system was more than just a theory; it had significant effects on legal inequality and social stratification. As this system grew increasingly inflexible over time, *jati* (sub-castes) emerged, solidifying social hierarchies even further. Social relations and one's place in the social order were influenced by the idea of ritual purity and contamination, which became crucial. People who were considered 'lower' in the social hierarchy were frequently subjected to prejudice and marginalization as a result of this strict segmentation<sup>26</sup>.

An important factor in this socioeconomic distinction was gender. *Brahmanical* writings, like the *Manusmriti*, frequently portray women as inferior to men and limit their main responsibilities to the home and religion. Some texts limit women's liberty, access to education, and ownership of property, even as they recognize the significance of women in rituals and family life. The *Manusmriti*, for example, emphasizes the patriarchal character of ancient Indian culture by stating that a woman must be under the guardianship of her father, husband, or son and that it is

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<sup>24</sup> MAAZ ALI KHAN, "A Study of Victim Compensation in India with Emphasis on Judicial Activism", *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, Volume 7 Issue 1 (2024): 1595

<sup>25</sup> Akanksha Sanil, "Revisiting Inequality and Caste in State and Social Laws: Perspectives of Manu, Phule and Ambedkar", *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, Volume 4, No. 2 (October 2023): 267-287

<sup>26</sup> Chakravarti, Uma. "Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 28, No. 14, (1993): 579-585

her responsibility to serve them<sup>27</sup>. Gender inequality is also reflected in and reinforced by legal documents from this era. Women's legal position was frequently linked to their male relatives, and their property rights were restricted. Sons usually inherited property before daughters, and women were placed in a secondary position when it came to inheritance. In addition, some scriptures legalized practices such as sati (the self-immolation of widows) and *niyoga* (levirate marriage), which demonstrated the drastic ways in which women's liberty was restricted<sup>28</sup>.

Although gendered legal structures and the *varṇa* system were ingrained in ancient Indian society, there were also instances of reform and resistance. By promoting more egalitarian ideals, heterodox religions such as Buddhism and Jainism questioned the dominant societal standards. These traditions drew followers from a variety of social classes, including women and lesser *varṇas*, by rejecting the authority of the Brahmanical texts and promoting concepts of spiritual equality<sup>29</sup>. In ancient India, a complex social fabric marked by discrimination and stratification was produced by the interaction of *dharma*, *varṇa*, gender, and legal inequity. Although these institutions offered a structure for social order, they also established disparities that disadvantaged some groups, especially women and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In India, the history of these systems still shapes current debates over gender and caste<sup>30</sup>.

### **Dharma and Distributive Justice**

India's ancient moral, legal, and political philosophy is based on the idea of Dharma, which is the foundation of justice as well as its yardstick. In the Indian context, Dharma included an integrated framework of obligations (*kartavya*), rights (*adhikara*), and moral order (*ṛta*), in contrast to the contemporary Western concept of justice as either distributive or retributive. Justice was seen as a distributed moral system that functions at the social, familial, and cosmic levels rather than as something that the ruler imposed from above. According to the Vedic literature, especially the *R̥gveda* and *Atharvaveda*, *ṛta* is the cosmic principle of order that upholds society and nature. This metaphysical order became Dharma, the basis of justice (*nyaya*) and law (*vyavahara*), when it was transformed into ethical and social life. In this system, each person's duties were determined

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<sup>27</sup> Mandal, Gobinda Chandra. "The Rights and Status of Women in Ancient India: Insights from Hindu Legal Literature." *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Humanities)*, Volume 70, No. 1, (2025): 1–35

<sup>28</sup> Urmila Ray, "Idealizing Motherhood: The Brahmanical Discourse on Women in Ancient India (circa 500 BCE–300 CE)" *PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies* (University of London, 1999)

<sup>29</sup> Upinder Singh, *History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century* (Pearson Longman, 2008), 291–319

<sup>30</sup> Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2002), 123–127.

according to their role (*varna-asrama-dharma*) within society, not as an instrument of inequality but as a mechanism to maintain balance and interdependence in the social order<sup>31</sup>. The *Dharmasutras* and *Dharmasastras* extended this notion of fairness through codified norms for governance, adjudication, and daily conduct. The ruler (raja) was portrayed as the earthly manifestation of divine justice, charged with upholding dharma via law (*daṇḍa*), and justice was conceived in *Manusmṛti* as an extension of Dharma<sup>32</sup>. By making a distinction between *vyavahara* (legal procedure), *acara* (customary conduct), and *prayascitta* (penance), the *Yajnavalkya Smṛiti* improved this concept and established a framework for dispersed justice that pervaded all spheres of social life<sup>33</sup>. These texts reveal that ancient Indian jurisprudence was pluralistic—justice was administered not solely by the king or state but also by local assemblies (*sabhas*, *samitis*, *panchayats*), guilds (*srenis*), and family elders. Such decentralization ensured that justice was participatory and context-sensitive, reflecting the shared responsibility of upholding *dharma*<sup>34</sup>.

Perhaps the most comprehensive philosophical discussion of dharma and justice can be found in the Mahabharata. According to the Santi Parva, dharma is inseparable from compassion (*daya*) and truth (*satya*), subtle (*sukṣma*), and context-dependent<sup>35</sup>. The well-known exchange between Bhiṣma and Yudhiṣṭhira highlights the conflict between ideal dharma and practical administration, stating that in order to maintain welfare and order, kings must administer *daṇḍa* (punishment) in a wise and restrained manner<sup>36</sup>. This equilibrium between social fairness and moral obligation is what contemporary theorists could refer to as distributed justice, in which all parties, from the monarch to the commoner, had a role in upholding society's moral foundation. This concept was expanded upon in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, which established judicial and administrative procedures for just governance. Kautilya distinguished between *dharma* (moral law), *artha* (economic interest), and *nyaya* (legal justice), insisting that justice be dispensed according to circumstances while remaining grounded in ethical order<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18–21.

<sup>32</sup> Manu, *Manusmṛti*, ed. and trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 131.

<sup>33</sup> P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra- Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. II, Part I, 1941), 4–6.

<sup>34</sup> Pradeep Kumar Gautam, *Understanding Dharma and Artha in Statecraft through Kautilya's Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2016), 37–40

<sup>35</sup> *Mahabharata, Santi Parva*, trans. Kisari Mohan Ganguli (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), Section 60, 231–233

<sup>36</sup> S.P. Dubey, “The Concept of Moral Dilemma: Its Applicability in The Context of the Mahabharata”, in B. K. Matilal, *The Moral Dilemma in the Mahabharata in Moral Dilemmas in the Mahabharata* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, in Association with Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), 25–29.

<sup>37</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, trans. R. Shamasastri (Bangalore: Government Press, 1961), Book III, Ch. 1–4, 112–117.

Therefore, in ancient India, *dharma* stood for a complex idea of justice that was simultaneously social, personal, and cosmic. It aimed to achieve balance between the earthly and spiritual realms, between obligations and rights, and between ruling and ruled. Justice was an inherent moral duty that all members of society shared, not only the domain of monarchs or judges. Because justice was spread, the legal system was community-focused and self-regulating rather than coercive<sup>38</sup>. To put it simply, *loka- samgraha's* ultimate objective—the preservation and well-being of the world—was to be realized through dharma as distributive justice<sup>39</sup>.

### Concluding Remarks

At the core of the traditional Indian legal system is the idea of Dharma, which functions as an overarching moral and cosmic order that governs both statecraft and individual behavior rather than just a collection of prescriptive laws. Dharma represents a moral jurisprudence that incorporates ethical, spiritual, and social aspects into the administration of justice, in contrast to contemporary legal positivism, which places an emphasis on codified statutes and institutional enforcement. Dharma, according to the ancient jurists Manu, Yajñavalkya, and Narada, is the yardstick of fairness (*nyaya*) and the cornerstone of societal peace<sup>40</sup>.

According to this paradigm, the king's responsibility was to guarantee that his rule adhered to Dharma as stated in the *Sastras* and practiced by customary law (*acara*), rather than to enact laws<sup>41</sup>. As a result, the legal system sought truth and reconciliation rather than just punishment, becoming less combative and more cooperative<sup>42</sup>. Dharma served as the substantive and procedural core of the law, and justice and righteousness were therefore closely related in the Indian worldview.

Dharma's holistic view of justice, which goes beyond legality to pursue moral equity and social benefit, is what gives it its continuing significance<sup>43</sup>. It acknowledges that when justice is absent from the law, it becomes impersonal and lacks moral meaning. As a result, the Dharma-based classical Indian legal tradition still provides a philosophical counterbalance to modern jurisprudence by highlighting the need for justice to be in line with moral order and human welfare (*lokasangraha*). Thus, the development of Indian jurisprudence from the *Dharmasutras* to the *Dharmashastras* shows that justice in its purest form is

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<sup>38</sup> Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Vol. I, 1923), 138–142

<sup>39</sup> Duncan M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 57–59

<sup>40</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra- Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol. I, 1930), 12

<sup>41</sup> Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, 6

<sup>42</sup> Patrick Olivelle (ed. & trans.), *Dharmasutras*, 45

<sup>43</sup> Werner Menski, *Hindu Law: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 98.

inextricably linked to Dharma, the timeless principle that underpins both the cosmos and human civilization.

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### **Brief Profile of Author**

**Prof. (Dr.) Nitin** earned his LL.B. and LL.M. from the Department of Laws, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, and completed his Ph.D. at the Department of Laws, Panjab University, Chandigarh. A UGC-NET qualified scholar with over 15 years of teaching experience, he currently serves as Professor at the Maharaja Agrasen School of Law, Maharaja Agrasen University, Himachal Pradesh. Dr. Nitin is the author of the book "Law, Religion and Secularism", editor of three books, and has published more than 30 research papers and articles in reputed national and international journals. He has also contributed 15 chapters to edited volumes. His academic work spans diverse fields, including Jurisprudence, Criminal Law, Insurance Law, and Law and Religion. He serves on the Editorial Advisory Board of *Remarkings and Analyses* and is a Reviewer for the *Journal of the Indian Law Institute*. Dr. Nitin has guided eight Ph.D. scholars and over thirty-five LL.M. dissertations.

**Mobile:** 9459265268;

**E-Mail:** nitinlasta@gmail.com

**Dr. Shruti Dahiya** (BA LLB (Hons.), LL.M., Ph.D) is working as an Assistant Professor at Amity Law School. She is deeply engaged in exploring intersections between law, society, and justice, with her scholarship focusing on customary laws in Punjab, delegated legislation, human rights, and access to justice frameworks. Dr. Dahiya has contributed to multiple national and international research projects and has presented papers at prestigious platforms, including the Global Alliance for Justice Education (GAJE) and Asia CLE Conferences. Her research and teaching emphasise constitutional morality, social justice, and rights-based legal reform.

## 16.

# Indian Knowledge System and Digital Privacy Law: Insights from Indian Scriptures and the DPDP Act, 2023

**Mr. Lokanath Patra**

*Assistant Professor of Law*

*Ganjam Law College, Berhampur, Odisha*

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### **Abstract**

*The protection of personal data has become a fundamental right and a legal need in the era of rapid digitization. The ethical underpinnings of privacy and informational discretion are deeply rooted in India's intellectual and spiritual traditions, even while contemporary legislation like the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, defines the procedures of data governance. By directly comparing the legislative requirements of the DPDP Act with the teachings of the ancient scriptures, this chapter examines the relationship between India's Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and modern data protection legislation. In order to derive ethical and jurisprudential principles that align with the legal rights and duties outlined in the DPDP Act, the text critically examines traditional Sanskrit texts, including the Upanisads, Manusmṛti, Arthashastra, Chandogya Upanisad, Bhagavad Gita, and Nyaya Sutras. In-depth discussions of ethical communication, confidentiality, eligibility-based knowledge transmission (adhikara), minimalism in disclosure, the moral obligation to correct, and the duty to inform can be found in ancient Indian texts. Modern legal concepts like informed consent, data minimization, breach notification, fiduciary duty, and the right to rectification are all strongly correlated with these ideas.*

*For example, Section 8(3) of the DPDP Act, which addresses a Data Fiduciary's need to maintain secrecy, is echoed in the Manusmṛti's advice on protecting secrets. The DPDP Act's mandate to inform Data Principals of data breaches is analogous to the Chandogya Upanisad's invocation of epistemic completeness and transparency. Similar to the exclusions granted by the Act's national interest clauses, the Arthashastra offers advice on protecting state secrets. These parallels are not only symbolic but also provide meaningful, culturally relevant insights into the ethical requirements of data governance in India. This chapter also makes the case that knowledge (vidya) and information (rahasya) are regarded in Indian scriptures as sacred things that need to be safeguarded by self-control, discretion, and discipline. This is consistent with the DPDP Act's fiduciary model, which requires data processors to operate in the best interests of data principals both morally and legally. Both ancient and contemporary fields place a strong focus on the inherent righteousness, reliability, and dharmic balance of data management in addition to its procedural legitimacy.*

*The chapter provides a distinctive jurisprudential prism for analyzing current privacy legislation in India, employing a doctrinal, comparative, and interpretive methodology. It advances the notion that societal legitimacy, compliance, and sustainable governance are more likely to be achieved through legislative reforms rooted in indigenous traditions. Furthermore, incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems into contemporary legal discourse provides a means of achieving culturally grounded legal diversity that respects the depth of the nation's civilization while adhering to international norms. This chapter concludes by highlighting the fact that privacy and data protection are not new concepts in Indian culture; rather, they have long been discussed in the country's sacred texts. A more comprehensive and stronger data protection system—one that upholds human dignity while connecting with India's cultural identity—is made possible by acknowledging this philosophical and ethical continuity.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act), Privacy and Ethics in Indian Scriptures, Comparative Legal Philosophy, Data Fiduciary and Dharma, Ancient Indian Jurisprudence, Culturally Contextualized Privacy Law.*

## **1. Introduction**

The growing prevalence of digital technology in daily life has elevated personal data to a central position in legal, ethical, and social discussions. As governments, organizations, and individuals increasingly depend on digital platforms for communication, trade, and governance, the imperative to safeguard personal data has intensified. In response to this demand, the Indian Parliament adopted the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, establishing a comprehensive framework for the legitimate processing, storage, and transfer of personal data. The DPDP Act serves as a modern legal answer to digital issues; however, the core principles it upholds—namely, permission, secrecy, purpose limitation, and fiduciary duty—are not new within the Indian framework.

This chapter asserts that the ideas foundational to the contemporary data protection framework have been discussed within India's ancient philosophical and ethical traditions for an extended period. Ancient Indian texts—specifically the Upaniṣads, Manusmṛti, Arthaśāstra, Bhagavad Gītā, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, and Nyāya Sūtras—provide profound doctrinal perspectives on the sanctity of knowledge (vidyā), the ethics of revelation, the parameters of secrecy (rahasya), and the ethical obligations associated with the sharing and retention of information. These passages underscore not only the act of communication but also the qualifications of the recipient (adhikāra), the suitability of the environment, and the obligation of moderation.

This chapter aims to demonstrate that India's data protection jurisprudence can be enhanced and culturally contextualized by referencing Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) through comparisons between ancient sources and particular provisions of the DPDP Act. It examines how scriptural wisdom provides normative advice that supplements legal standards and strengthens the ethical foundation of privacy rights.

This chapter enhances the discourse on legal plurality, advocating that Indian law should not be exclusively interpreted via Western frameworks. It can develop into a distinctive paradigm that amalgamates civilizational values with global legal advancements. This method guarantees enhanced acceptance and compliance among Indian individuals while facilitating the establishment of a privacy framework that is foundational, pertinent, and robust in the digital era.

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter employs a doctrinal and comparative analytical framework grounded in legal philosophy, scriptural exegesis, and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The methodology is predominantly qualitative, seeking to analyze ancient Indian religious texts and align them with the tenets established in the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. The research is non-empirical yet meticulously interpretive, employing the hermeneutic technique on classical sources and legislative documents.

The principal sources are canonical texts such as the Upaniṣads, Manusmṛti, Arthaśāstra, Bhagavad Gītā, Nyāya Sūtras, and segments of the Vedas and Itihāsas, notably the Mahābhārata. The books were analyzed in their original Sanskrit forms and in highly recognized English translations by prominent scholars. Each scripture reference was analyzed contextually to derive normative ideas pertinent to the safeguarding of personal information, privacy, ethical communication, and confidentiality.

The study simultaneously performs a detailed analysis of the DPDP Act, 2023—India's latest legislation concerning personal data protection. Legislative provisions were analyzed in relation to the values and concepts derived from Indian scriptures to ascertain both convergence and divergence.

For the comparative analysis, secondary materials, including scholarly commentary, peer-reviewed publications, and authoritative texts on Indian philosophy, data ethics, and privacy law, were utilized. The chapter incorporates principles from legal anthropology and comparative jurisprudence to connect classical normative frameworks with contemporary legal systems.

The primary aim of this methodology is to provide a culturally relevant comprehension of data protection that recognizes India's intellectual legacy while facilitating current policy discussions on digital governance.

### 3. Scriptural Foundations and Legal Parallels

This section provides selected passages from Indian scriptures and aligns them with relevant legal standards under the DPDP Act, 2023.

#### 3.1 Taittirīya Upaniṣad and Section 8: Ethical Regulation of Disclosure

**Sanskrit Verse:** सत्यं वद। धर्मं चर। स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः ॥<sup>44</sup>

This verse from the Taittirīya Upaniṣad embodies a moral framework grounded in truthfulness (satya), virtuous behavior (dharma), and the earnest quest for knowledge (svādhyāya). These principles have substantial consequences for the current discourse on digital ethics and privacy. In the contemporary data-driven landscape, upholding truth and adhering to dharma necessitates a commitment to processing data lawfully, transparently, and for ethically motivated objectives. Moreover, svādhyāya, or self-study, denotes a continuous awareness and reflection, which serves as an imperative for data fiduciaries to implement due diligence and ongoing evaluation of their data management procedures.

The DPDP Act, 2023, namely Section 8<sup>45</sup>, establishes the basis for the authorized handling of personal data. Data must be acquired and processed equitably and transparently, for a designated legitimate purpose, and with suitable protections in place. Subsection 8(1) of the Act stipulates that the processing of personal data shall occur solely for a legitimate purpose and with the acquisition of consent, thereby safeguarding against any violation of ethical obligations. This embodies the Upaniṣadic doctrine that veracity and ethical behavior should underpin all human endeavors, including technological and administrative pursuits.

Consequently, the verse underscores a perennial value system in which ethical behavior, particularly with the management of others' information or confidence, is of utmost importance. Section 8 of the DPDP Act reflects these ethical ideals through binding legislative requirements, establishing a significant link between historical wisdom and contemporary government.

This passage underscores veracity and commitment to dharma (moral principles). Section 8 of the DPDP Act stipulates lawful processing, purpose limitation, and ethical management of personal data, reflecting the moral constraints emphasized in the Upaniṣhads.

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<sup>44</sup> Taittirīya Upaniṣad, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 1.11.2

<sup>45</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s.8

### 3.2 Manusmṛti and Sections 7(c) & 8(1)<sup>46</sup>: Limiting Disclosure to the Deserving

**Sanskrit Verse:** न तद्वेदं पुरा ब्रूयाद्येन मूढः प्रमाद्यति।<sup>47</sup>

**Translation:** "One should not impart that knowledge to a fool which, if misunderstood, could lead to harm."

The Sanskrit verse states: "One should not disclose that knowledge which causes the ignorant to become heedless." One should refrain from sharing knowledge with a fool, as that could result in harm if misinterpreted. This line from the Manusmṛti emphasizes the significance of prudence in the sharing of sensitive information. It cautions against disseminating information to individuals who lack the intellectual or ethical competence to understand it appropriately. The fundamental premise is to protect both the information and the individuals from misuse, misinterpretation, or injury.

Within contemporary digital ecosystems, this age-old directive corresponds with the fundamental principles of personal data protection. The DPDP Act, 2023, namely Section 7(c), mandates that the data principal must be informed in clear and comprehensible language regarding the purpose and processing of their data. Section 8(1) stipulates that data processing shall occur solely for legitimate reasons and in compliance with the consent acquired from the data principal.

This legal framework strengthens the ethical obligation articulated in Manusmṛti to guarantee that sensitive material is revealed solely to individuals possessing the appropriate intent and comprehension. Unqualified or contextless disclosure may result in misunderstanding, exploitation, or breaches of personal dignity. The DPDP Act, by restricting data access via consent and purpose specification, reflects the age-old scriptural principle of safeguarding both the individual and the integrity of information.

**Consequently,** the ancient wisdom of Manusmṛti is particularly pertinent in the contemporary digital era, where unrestricted access to personal information may lead to disinformation, manipulation, or even injury. The prudence of concealing information from the unqualified parallels the legal obligation to safeguard personal data from unauthorized access or negligent processing.

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<sup>46</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, ss. 7(c), 8(1)

<sup>47</sup> Manusmṛiti: The Laws of Manu, trans. G. Buhler (Oxford University Press, 1886), ch. 2, verse 162.

### 3.3 Arthaśāstra and Section 17: Safeguarding State Secrets

**Sanskrit Excerpt:** राजस्निहितं रहस्यं कार्यम्।<sup>48</sup>

**Translation:** "Matters that are in the interest of the King (state) must be kept secret."

*"Affairs pertinent to the King (state) must remain confidential."*

This directive from Kautilya's Arthaśāstra emphasizes the paramount significance of confidentiality in governance, especially regarding state matters. The phrase "rajasnihitam rahasyam" denotes information advantageous to the governance and authority of the state, necessitating careful management to prevent misuse, espionage, or risks to national security. Kautilya asserts that the effectiveness of statecraft depends on the prudent concealment of sensitive information and the tactical application of intelligence.

This ancient notion is reflected in Section 17 of the DPDP Act, 2023,<sup>49</sup> under the framework of data governance. This article delineates particular exclusions for the processing of personal data when deemed essential for national security, sovereignty, public order, or diplomatic relations with foreign governments. Section 17 permits the Central Government to exempt any governmental agency from the terms of the Act for grounds pertaining to national interest. The Arthaśāstra does not support opacity in all administrative matters; instead, it underscores the importance of context-specific discretion, a principle reflected in contemporary legal discourse around state surveillance, data categorization, and exceptions for public interest. In accordance with Kautilya's caution over the indiscriminate sharing of state-critical information, the DPDP Act mandates that the processing of sensitive data in security-related settings is regulated by sovereign authority rather than conventional consent-based protocols.

Thus, the Arthaśāstra establishes the theoretical foundation for modern discussions on reconciling individual privacy with collective security. The wisdom offers a philosophical justification for the exemption provision in Section 17, confirming that confidentiality in the public interest has always been a fundamental aspect of Indian administrative philosophy.

### 3.4 Mahābhārata and Section 9: Respecting Confidential Communication

**Sanskrit Verse:** रहस्यं च परं ब्रूयान्न स सर्वत्र भाषते।<sup>50</sup>

**Translation:** "One should speak confidential matters only in private and not divulge them indiscriminately."

Confidential information should only be discussed in private and not disclosed indiscriminately.

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<sup>48</sup> Kautilya, The Arthashastra, trans. R. Shamasastri (Penguin Classics, 1991), Book I, Chapter XV

<sup>49</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s. 17

<sup>50</sup> Mahabharata, Sabha Parva, Ch. 60 (Critical Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute)

This line from the Mahābhārata's Sabha Parva underscores the notion of contextual discretion in speech, especially concerning delicate or confidential issues. Confidential information should be disclosed solely to authorized individuals and in a way that preserves its sensitive nature. Ancient Indian ethical systems stated that communication should be governed not only by veracity but also by discretion, context, and audience.

This enduring principle is currently expressed in Section 9 of the DPDP Act, 2023<sup>51</sup>. Section 9 delineates the circumstances under which the data principal is considered to have provided consent, including in instances of voluntary data sharing or when contextual indicators suggest informed awareness. The clause safeguards the integrity of confidential communication by prohibiting its misuse or unauthorized distribution without just cause.

Moreover, the section acknowledges the concept of "purpose-limited" use—if data was disseminated in a private or restricted context, it should not be construed as a comprehensive relinquishment of privacy. This aligns with the Mahābhārata's stance that personal affairs should not be discussed freely or casually.

Consequently, the poem endorses the ancient Indian ideal of exerting discernment and honesty in communication—tenets that are currently implemented by statutory privacy safeguards. This demonstrates a notable philosophical link between ancient Indian thought and contemporary privacy law.

### 3.5 Chāndogya Upaniṣad and Sections 6 & 7: Gradual and Informed Disclosure

**Sanskrit Verse:** एष सोम्य मार्गः... उपनिषदं ब्रूहि मे।<sup>52</sup>

**Translation:** "This, dear one, is the path... please teach me the Upaniṣad."

In this excerpt from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, the pupil respectfully solicits guidance from the instructor, recognizing the teacher's authority and the importance of readiness prior to acquiring sacred wisdom. The student does not assume access; instead, knowledge is disseminated progressively, based on preparedness and qualification. This highlights a multifaceted paradigm of information distribution, wherein learning, akin to access to confidential material, is regulated by contextual relevance and informed solicitation.

This framework is significantly pertinent to the stipulations outlined in Sections 6 and 7 of the DPDP Act, 2023<sup>53</sup>. Section 6 requires a Data Fiduciary to notify the Data Principal before seeking consent, detailing the personal data being gathered

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<sup>51</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Chandogya Upanisad, trans. Swami Gambhiranananda (Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 3.11.5.

<sup>53</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, ss. 6,7.

and the purpose of its use. Section 7 delineates the criteria for valid permission, underscoring that it must be voluntary, informed, specified, and unequivocal.

The Upaniṣadic example indicates that the revelation of profound knowledge or sensitive information necessitates a purposeful endeavor of inquiry, comprehension, and preparedness. The similarity with data governance is the principle that information should not be imposed on users without their understanding and agreement. It should be disseminated only to those who request it, comprehend it, and are ready for it—ensuring ethical accountability from the discloser.

The ancient Upaniṣadic tradition and the DPDP Act both emphasize the significance of informed consent and gradual disclosure, hence upholding the dignity and autonomy of the recipient. They advocate for a communication model that is courteous, intentional, and cognizant of power dynamics in the dissemination of knowledge or information.

### 3.6 Nyāya Sūtra and Sections 5 & 6: Cognition and Legal Notice

**Sanskrit Verse:** प्रमाणप्रमेयसंशयप्रयोजन दृष्टान्तसिद्धान्तावयवतर्कनिरणयवाद  
जल्पवितण्डाहेत्वाभास छलजातिनिग्रहस्थानानां तत्त्वज्ञानान्निःश्रेयसाधिगमः।<sup>54</sup>

**Translation:** "Liberation (niḥśreyasa) is attained through the true knowledge (tattvajñāna) of the sixteen categories such as means of knowledge (pramāṇa), objects of knowledge (prameya), doubt (saṁśaya), purpose (prayojana), illustrative example (dṛṣṭānta), established doctrine (siddhānta), and so on."

The attainment of ultimate well-being arises from the knowledge of the essence of entities, which is derived from the principles of proof, the object of proof, doubt, purpose, exemplification, conclusion, and the refutation of fallacies, as well as the understanding of deceptive appearances and the cessation of their influence.

"Liberation (niḥśreyasa) is achieved through the authentic understanding (tattvajñāna) of the sixteen categories, including means of knowledge (pramāṇa), objects of knowledge (prameya), doubt (saṁśaya), purpose (prayojana), illustrative example (dṛṣṭānta), established doctrine (siddhānta), among others."

This seminal stanza from the Nyāya Sūtra delineates the sixteen categories of logic and epistemology essential for rational investigation and the pursuit of truth. Pramāṇa (valid cognition) and prameya (object of knowledge) are important for comprehending the process of reaching appropriate conclusions. The verse underscores that accurate information derives from credible sources, clear objectives, illustrative examples, and sound reasoning—a structure that closely aligns with the tenets of legal notice and user permission in data protection.

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<sup>54</sup> Nyaya Sutra, 1.1.1 in The Nyaya Sutras of Gautama, trans. Ganganatha Jha (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984),3.

Section 5 of the DPDP Act<sup>55</sup> delineates the rights of the Data Principal, encompassing the right to access information regarding the personal data being collected. Section 6 emphasizes this by requiring a transparent and comprehensible notification to the Data Principal prior to acquiring consent. The regulation reflects the Nyāya model of epistemic integrity by mandating that users have clear, purpose-specific information (prajñāna), allowing them to make informed judgments (pramāṇa) regarding the risks and extent of data sharing.

The Nyāya approach asserts that decisions should rely on good comprehension and valid inference, akin to the requirement for data principals under the DPDP Act to make informed decisions based on transparent disclosures. This integration of ancient knowledge and modern legal principles asserts that ethical data governance is grounded in clarity, rationality, and accountability.

### 3.7 Bhagavad Gītā and Section 8(3)(d): Self-restraint in Data Use

**Sanskrit Verse:** मनःप्रसादः सौम्यत्वं मौनम् आत्मविनिग्रहः।<sup>56</sup>

**Translation:** "Serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, self-restraint—these are called the austerity of the mind."

In this passage from Chapter 17 of the Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Krishna articulates the mental practices that embody inward austerity (tapas). These encompass peace (manah-prasādaḥ), mildness (saumyatvam), silence (maunam), and self-regulation (ātma-vinigrahaḥ). These virtues are deemed fundamental for ethical and spiritual advancement, fostering deliberate restraint and prudent behavior even in areas devoid of external regulation.

This internalized moral framework exactly corresponds to the fiduciary obligations specified in Section 8(3)(d) of the DPDP Act, 2023<sup>57</sup>. This provision mandates Data Fiduciaries to guarantee that the acquisition and processing of personal data is not excessive and is confined to what is essential for the designated purpose. It presents the notion of data minimization, advocating for moderation in data collection and management practices. The legal obligation reflects the Gītā's principle of restraint—not via force, but through moral conviction.

The spiritual practice of ātma-vinigrahaḥ (self-restraint) acts as a compelling parallel for data fiduciaries who must willingly curtail their overreach. The fiduciary is urged to exercise ethical restraint by utilizing personal data solely in a manner that is necessary, proportionate, and respectful of human autonomy, rather than exploiting it for profit or convenience.

Thus, this line from the Gītā offers a persuasive ethical analogy to the legal

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<sup>55</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, ss. 5,6.

<sup>56</sup> Bhagavad Gita, 17.16 in The Bhagavadgita, trans. S. Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948),368.

<sup>57</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s. 8(3)

obligation of restraint articulated in Section 8(3)(d). It underscores that legitimate data processing transcends mere compliance, embodying profound virtues of self-awareness, responsibility, and inner discipline.

### 3.8 Atharva Veda and Section 5(2): Data Principal's Right to Correction

**Sanskrit Verse:** या ते भूमे रजः सन्धृता रात्रिभिः पर्वतेषु च।<sup>58</sup>

**Translation:** "O Earth, whatever of you has been held fast by darkness or by mountains, may we rectify and make visible."

This passage from the Atharva Veda articulates a ceremonial and metaphysical appeal for the revelation and rectification of concealed aspects of nature, seeking clarity, restoration, and correction of what is veiled. In Vedic cosmology, this concept embodies the pursuit of completeness, order (ṛta), and the correction of both cosmic and moral transgressions. Metaphorically applied to personal data, this represents the right to rectify inaccuracies and regain control over information that may have been misrepresented or concealed. This ancient knowledge aligns closely with Section 5(2) of the DPDP Act, 2023<sup>59</sup>, which grants the Data Principal the right to rectify, complete, or update their personal data as required. The section acknowledges the individual's right to informational autonomy and data accuracy, safeguarding against the potential harm or unfairness caused by obsolete or erroneous data. It mandates that data must be both lawful and accurate, accurately representing reality. The Act, by conferring a right to correction, reflects the restorative goal articulated in the Vedic verse—to provide clarity in confusion and order in chaos. This further elucidates how ancient Indian writings assimilated the ideals of accountability, dignity, and truthfulness—principles fundamental to contemporary data protection frameworks. The Atharva Veda figuratively foresees the modern concept that individuals ought to rectify misrepresentations, so cementing the link between self-sovereignty and precise knowledge.

### 3.9 Manusmṛti and Section 8(3): Duty to Protect Shared Confidentiality

**Sanskrit Verse:** गोपनीयं प्रयत्नेन कार्यं कुशलबुद्धिना। रक्षितं सर्वथा यत्नात्सिद्धिं समुपैति हि॥<sup>60</sup>

**Translation:** "A wise person should diligently protect what must be kept secret; what is properly protected always attains success."

This line from the Manusmṛti underscores the virtue of discretion and the diligent effort (prayatna) necessary to uphold confidentiality. It indicates that prudence in managing sensitive issues is not passive but requires intentional, adept involvement (kuśala-buddhinā) to guarantee that secrecy results in successful

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<sup>58</sup> Atharva Veda, 12.1.35 in The Hymns of the Atharvaveda, trans. Ralph T.H. Griffith (Benares: E.J. Lazarus, 1895), 232.

<sup>59</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s. 5(2).

<sup>60</sup> Manusmṛti (4.64) in The Laws of Manu, trans. G. Buhler, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 136, 4.64

solutions (siddhi). The passage suggests that trust and discretion are essential for ethical behavior and societal stability. This corresponds with Section 8(3) of the DPDP Act, 2023<sup>61</sup>, which delineates the responsibilities of Data Fiduciaries. Clause 8(3)(d) stipulates that personal data shall be treated in a manner that is neither excessive nor above what is necessary for the designated purpose. Furthermore, the fiduciary must guarantee that the data is safeguarded against illegal access, disclosure, or processing.

The Manusmṛti's emphasis on confidentiality as a prerequisite for favorable results parallels contemporary privacy legislation's commitment to protecting personal data. The fiduciary obligation to safeguard user data—during transmission, storage, or processing—embodies an ethical principle profoundly rooted in Indian religious traditions. It indicates that data protection transcends a simply technical or legal necessity, embodying a moral responsibility as well. Consequently, ancient Indian ethical precepts bolster the regulatory aims of the DPDP Act by promoting diligence, caution, and moral judgment in safeguarding secrecy. Both viewpoints align on the notion that enduring success—be it social, administrative, or technological—depends on the integrity of information management methods.

### 3.10 Chāndogya Upaniṣad and Section 9: Duty to Inform About Breach

**Sanskrit Verse:** यथा ब्रह्मविद्यया सर्वं विदितं भवति एवं न विशिष्यते।<sup>62</sup>

**Translation:** "As by knowing one piece of gold, everything made of gold becomes known, so too by knowing Brahman, all this becomes known." This profound revelation from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad illustrates the notion of systemic awareness and interrelated knowledge. The passage implies that understanding the essence or core truth (Brahman) provides insight into all its manifestations. This ideology advocates for epistemic clarity, transparency, and disclosure, acknowledging the entirety when the essence is unveiled. This notion aligns with the responsibility stipulated in Section 9 of the DPDP Act, 2023<sup>63</sup>, which mandates Data Fiduciaries to notify the Data Principal and the Board in the occurrence of a personal data breach. The purpose of this part is to promote transparency and confidence in data governance. The breach notification must specify the nature of the breach, the type of personal data involved, and potential repercussions, ensuring that the Data Principal is informed about matters that directly impact them. This duty to reveal reflects the Upaniṣadic dedication to integrity via veracity. Similar to how the knower of Brahman understands all that arises from it, the

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<sup>61</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s. 8(3).

<sup>62</sup> Chandogya Upaniṣad, 6.1.3 in The Principal Upanishads, trans. S. Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), 447

<sup>63</sup> Republic of India, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, s. 9.

revelation of a data breach allows the user to grasp the implications for their digital identity. The obligation to inform is not merely regulatory; it is ethical, upholding the individual's right to be informed and to act accordingly. By adhering to this Upaniṣadic principle, the DPDP Act promotes a culture of transparency and accountability, wherein awareness of risk and responsibility coexists with informed action and systemic comprehension.

#### **4. Discussion: Bridging Ancient Ethos and Contemporary Legal Norms**

The prior parts demonstrate a profound philosophical and ethical consistency between India's ancient scriptures and modern digital privacy legislation. Rather than being archaic or irrelevant, books such as the Upaniṣads, Manusmṛti, Arthaśāstra, and Bhagavad Gītā present enduring ideas that significantly align with contemporary data governance issues. These scriptures delineated principles of discretion, confidentiality, permission, accountability, and minimalism long before they were codified as legal requirements. What arises is a nuanced comprehension of privacy, not alone as a legal right but as an ethically driven principle ingrained in the cultural and spiritual legacy of India. The scriptural focus on *rahasya* (secrecy), *vinigraha* (self-control), and *satya* (truth) aligns with contemporary principles like purpose limitation, data minimization, and informed consent. This alignment contests the idea that digital privacy is solely a contemporary or Western legal framework.

Moreover, the Indian Knowledge System regards knowledge (or data) not as a commodity to be monopolized, but as a sacred substance that ought to be disseminated responsibly and ethically. The comparison also demonstrates how ancient writings incorporated mechanisms to regulate information dissemination—through eligibility (*adhikāra*), teacher-student discretion, and contextual relevance. These principles have structural parallels in the processes of the DPDP Act, such as notice, permission, data fiduciary responsibilities, and purpose-specific utilization. Furthermore, ancient Indian ethics emphasize not just the actions one must undertake but also the manner and rationale behind such actions. This aligns with the ethos of the DPDP Act, which conceptualizes data processing as not only permissible but also equitable and respectful. The obligation to avert harm, facilitate rectification, and guarantee substantial access is rooted in a comprehensive moral framework—similar to how Indian literature perceives information ethics as integral to one's *dharma*. This convergence presents a chance to enhance India's judicial system with cultural validity and historical profundity. It urges politicians, educators, and jurists to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge Systems into contemporary frameworks—not only as a symbolic act but as a substantial source of normative guidance. Ultimately, privacy rules grounded in civilizational principles are more likely to ensure compliance, cultivate trust, and maintain a healthy digital society.

## 5. Conclusion

The amalgamation of ancient Indian scripture wisdom with contemporary data protection legislation provides a distinctive jurisprudential perspective for analyzing and improving modern privacy regulations. The DPDP Act, 2023, emerges from technological exigency and legal reform, while also receiving profound ethical endorsement from the principles inherent in India's civilizational legacy. India's intellectual traditions, spanning from the Upaniṣadic pursuit of truth and unity to the Manusmṛti's advocacy for confidentiality, from the Arthaśāstra's pragmatic governance ethics to the Gītā's focus on restraint and inner discipline, have consistently acknowledged the sanctity of knowledge and the accompanying responsibilities of its application. These ancient concepts correspond exceptionally with the tenets of the DPDP Act—consent, transparency, purpose limitation, rights to rectification, and fiduciary duties.

This chapter aims to illustrate that privacy is not a contemporary cultural phenomenon, but a principle profoundly ingrained in the Indian psyche. By comparing scriptural verses with legal statutes, we promote a legal framework that is both structurally sound and ethically substantial. This strategy fosters legal systems that are contextually pertinent, culturally grounded, and globally reputable. As India progresses through the intricacies of its digital future, the insights of its past can act as a guiding compass. Legislators, academics, and the public may gain from this integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and modern legal principles—establishing a data protection framework that honors personal dignity while using the foundational values of its historical traditions.

### Important Books

1. Taitriya Upanisad, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Advaita Ashram, 2006)
2. Manusmṛti: The Laws of Manu, trans. G. Buhler (Oxford University Press, 1886)
3. Kautilya, The Arthashastra, trans. R. Shamasastri (Penguin Classics, 1991)
4. Mahabharata (Critical Edition, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute)
5. Chandogya Upanisad, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Advaita Ashram, 2006)
6. The Nyaya Sutras of Gautama, trans. Ganganatha Jha
7. The Bhagavad Gita, trans. S. Radhakrishnan
8. The Hymns of the Atharvaveda, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith

### Important Readings

1. Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, Government of India Gazette (2023)
2. Prabhu, Lakshmi, "Dharmic Dimensions of Privacy: Lessons from Indian Tradition," *Journal of Indian Law and Society*, 11, no. 2 (2023).
3. Chandrachud, D.Y., "Right to Privacy under Article 21," Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017) 10 SCC 1, concurring opinion.

4. Choudhury, Nilanjana, "Privacy, Dharma, and Data: Bridging Classical Thought and Modern Rights," *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 17, no. 2 (2024)

### **Brief Profile of Author**

**Mr. Lokanath Patra** is an Assistant Professor of Law at Ganjam Law College, Berhampur, Odisha, and the designated SPOC for SWAYAM/NPTEL Local Chapter (code 6323). He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Law at Berhampur University, and holds several distinctions including UGC-NET qualifications in Law, Management, Labour Welfare & HRM and IKS. His academic credentials also include LL.M (Berhampur University, where he was a topper), LLB (Lingaraj Law College), MBA in HR & Marketing (Dr. C. V. Raman University), M.Sc. in Information Technology (Guru Ghasidas University), a Postgraduate Diploma in Systems Management, and a Master Diploma in Software Engineering. Mr. Patra combines interdisciplinary training in law, IT, and management with a deep interest in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). His research interests span data protection law, legal theory, and the integration of indigenous philosophical traditions with modern jurisprudence. In his teaching and supervision, he emphasizes doctrinal scholarship, ethics, and cross-disciplinary engagement.

**Mob:** 7008039133

**E-mail:** lokanath\_aisect@rediffmail.com

## 17.

# Juvenile Justice in Ancient Indian Texts: An Interdisciplinary Study with Modern Law

Aparajita Gupta

Assistant Professor of Law

St. Aloysius Institute of Technology (Law), Jabalpur

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### Abstract

*The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), grounded in philosophy and ethics, envisions justice as a process of moral growth rather than punishment. Ancient Indian texts such as the Manusmṛti, Narada Smṛti, Yajñavalkya Smṛti and Arthashastra, along with epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, reflect a deeply humane approach toward children in conflict with norms. These works distinguished between youthful error and adult crime, recognizing age, intention (manas) and capacity for reform as crucial determinants of culpability. They promoted guidance, restitution and education within community and family frameworks; values embodied in the gurukula and āśrama traditions, where elders acted as both moral guides and rehabilitative agents. In contrast, modern juvenile justice in India is defined by the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, which upholds protection and rehabilitation but also faces pressure for stricter accountability in heinous offences. Judicial pronouncements in landmark cases highlight ongoing tensions between reform and retribution. By bridging these ancient and contemporary frameworks, this study argues that IKS principles such as compassion, moral education and community responsibility, can enrich modern juvenile jurisprudence. Anchored in constitutional and human rights values, a synthesis of traditional and modern insights can foster a restorative, culturally rooted and ethically sensitive model of justice that sees every child as capable of renewal and reintegration into society.*

**Keywords:** *Juveniles, Juvenile Justice, Indian Knowledge System, Ancient Indian Law, Rehabilitative Jurisprudence.*

### I. Introduction

Every civilization carries within it a philosophy of how to respond to the mistakes of its young. Some emphasize deterrence, others stress correction, and still others find ways to weave moral education into discipline. In India, this question has been part of our cultural memory for centuries. The way children in conflict with norms were treated in classical texts tells us not just about law, but about the Indian view of human growth and spiritual potential.

Modern India stands at a complex juncture. On the one hand, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 provides a structured framework for handling young offenders with an emphasis on rehabilitation, care, and reintegration.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, social outrage over certain heinous crimes has pushed lawmakers to introduce provisions that allow some juveniles between sixteen and eighteen years to be tried as adults.<sup>65</sup> This tension between mercy and severity, protection and punishment, continues to shape our debates today.

What is often overlooked, however, is that India is not encountering these dilemmas for the first time. Long before child psychology emerged as a modern science, Indian thinkers and lawmakers asked whether a child can be held fully responsible for their actions, and what forms of correction would benefit both the child and society. Texts like the *Manu Smṛti*, *Narada Smṛti*, and *Arthashastra* did not speak of “juvenile justice” in our modern vocabulary, but they offered nuanced approaches that distinguished between the immaturity of youth and the culpability of adults.<sup>66</sup> These texts often proposed guidance, restitution, or ritual penance rather than harsh punishment.

At the same time, the Indian epics embedded these lessons in narrative form. Stories from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* show elders intervening when youthful characters act rashly, teaching them lessons in humility, responsibility, and self-control.<sup>67</sup> These narratives conveyed to society that a child’s mistakes should not close the door to their future, but rather be seen as moments of learning.

This book chapter, therefore, attempts to build a bridge between two worlds: the inherited wisdom of India’s legal-philosophical tradition and the demands of a contemporary legal system rooted in constitutional values and international norms. The inquiry is not antiquarian; it does not seek to glorify the past uncritically. Instead, it asks: what principles from the Indian Knowledge System can enrich our present-day juvenile justice framework? Where do we find continuity, and where must we consciously depart from ancient practices to preserve equality, dignity, and non-discrimination?

The purpose of this study is thus twofold. First, to recover the ethical and legal imagination of ancient Indian texts with regard to children and wrongdoing.

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<sup>64</sup> Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, No. 2 of 2016, Government of India.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, § 15 (assessment of juveniles aged 16–18 in heinous offences).

<sup>66</sup> Manusmṛti 8.299–305, trans. G. Bühler, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886); Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, trans. L.N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Classics, 1992), 145–48; Julius Jolly, *The Minor Law-Books: Narada and Brihaspati* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889).

<sup>67</sup> K.M. Ganguli, trans., *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* (Calcutta: Bharata Press, 1896), Book II; R.C. Dutt, trans., *Ramayana* (Calcutta: Trübner & Co., 1899).

Second, to compare these insights with the present Juvenile Justice Act and related jurisprudence, highlighting lessons for reform. In doing so, the work hopes to show that India does not need to import every model of juvenile justice wholesale from abroad; our own traditions carry valuable resources that can make the law more humane, culturally resonant, and spiritually sensitive. In short, this is a call to reimagine juvenile justice not merely as an administrative mechanism but as a moral and cultural project, one that affirms the possibility of renewal in every child, honors community responsibility, and balances compassion with accountability.

## II. Juvenile Justice in Ancient Indian Texts

The modern phrase “juvenile justice” did not exist in Sanskrit or Prakrit, yet ancient Indian texts consistently reveal a sophisticated awareness that children must be treated differently from adults when they err. These works, such as legal treatises, administrative manuals, and epics, do not treat youth as miniature adults. Rather, they stress reduced culpability, the importance of intention, and the duty of family, teachers, and community to correct and guide. In this way, juvenile conduct was not seen as a threat to be suppressed but as a stage of growth to be nurtured.

### Manu Smṛti: Discipline with Limits

The *Manusmṛti* (c. 200 BCE–200 CE), while often criticized for its hierarchical framework, contains nuanced reflections on the principles of punishment. It states that *daṇḍa* (penalty) should vary according to “the crime, the time, the place, the age and the knowledge of the offender,” underscoring that punishment must be proportionate and individualized.<sup>68</sup> Although the text does not explicitly refer to juvenile offenders, later commentaries, particularly by Medhātithi, emphasize that dependents such as students and children may be corrected only with restraint and moral intent, not cruelty.<sup>69</sup>

**Further**, the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition attaches weight to the element of intent (*saṅkalpa*). As Robert Lingat notes, Indian jurists recognized that guilt presupposes maturity of mind; thus, a child acting without deliberation could not bear the same liability as an adult.<sup>70</sup> Manu also establishes that in cases involving

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<sup>68</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 199–201 (Manu 8.335–338).

<sup>69</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941), 313–15; Medhātithi's commentary on Manu 8.299–300.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 107–10.

minors, guardians, or family members bear the duty of restitution to the injured party, reflecting the communal character of justice in early Indian law.<sup>71</sup>

### **Narada Smṛti and Yajñavalkya Smṛti: Guardianship and Responsibility**

The *Narada Smṛti* (c. 2nd–5th century CE) further develops these themes by assigning responsibility to parents and guardians when a child commits an offence. If a son steals, it is the father who must repay the aggrieved party.<sup>72</sup> The emphasis falls on restoration rather than retribution: the wrong is repaired materially while the child is educated morally. Similarly, the *Yajñavalkya Smṛti* stresses that penalties for young offenders should focus on reform. It recognizes stages of life and assigns reduced liability to children and adolescents, while encouraging penance and ritual purification for youthful mistakes.<sup>73</sup>

Together, these texts suggest that in ancient jurisprudence, a child's wrongdoing was understood as a symptom of immaturity and inadequate guidance, not as evidence of an incorrigible criminal nature. Society's response was to reintegrate the child by holding the family accountable and providing moral instruction.

### **The Arthashastra: A Pragmatic State Policy**

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (c. 4th century BCE) is frequently read as a manual of power politics, but it also contains strikingly pragmatic measures regarding children. It provides for guardianship of minors' property until they reach maturity, ensuring that a child's future livelihood was protected.<sup>74</sup> Importantly, when children erred, the administrative system placed responsibility on their guardians. Negligent parents could be fined if their children caused harm or mischief.<sup>75</sup> This policy demonstrates two insights: first, that the state recognized children's diminished agency; second, that it valued social stability by making guardians liable for restitution.

The *Arthashastra* also integrates education into governance. Juveniles were seen as subjects of training and mentorship, not just as potential threats. In effect, the text treats youth as citizens-in-the-making, requiring investment in their correction and moral formation rather than exclusion.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Manusmṛti 8.344–346, trans. G. Bühler, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886).

<sup>72</sup> Julius Jolly, *The Minor Law-Books: Narada and Brihaspati* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 123–26.

<sup>73</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 310–15.

<sup>74</sup> *Arthasāstra* 3.5.26–28, in Kautilya, *The Arthasāstra*, trans. L.N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Classics, 1992), 145–48.

<sup>75</sup> *Arthasāstra* 4.8.1–6, *ibid.*, 151–52.

<sup>76</sup> *Arthasāstra* 1.5.1–7, *ibid.*, 78–80.

## Epic Narratives

Legal texts were complemented by narrative traditions that conveyed moral lessons through youthful characters. In the *Mahābhārata*, the mischief and pride of the Kaurava princes, as seen in episodes of deceit and arrogance, are repeatedly checked by elders and sages. In *Sabha Parva* (Chs. 53–55), Vidura’s impassioned counsel to Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra stands as the voice of *dharma*, urging self-restraint and humility.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Bhīma and the other Pāṇḍavas are reprovved in their youth, with correction framed as moral instruction rather than punitive sanction.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* likewise offers models of paternal and moral correction. In the *Bāla Kāṇḍa*, young Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa accompany the sage Viśvāmitra to the forest, where their discipline and courage are tested against temptation and anger. Under the sage’s patient guidance, they learn restraint and virtue, embodying the ideal that children’s errors invite guidance, not condemnation.<sup>78</sup>

## Common Threads

Across these diverse sources, several common principles emerge:

- **Differentiated Culpability:** Children were not judged by the same standards as adults. Immaturity was recognized as a mitigating factor.
- **Importance of Intent:** A deed committed in ignorance or playfulness was treated differently from a premeditated act.
- **Family and Community Accountability:** Guardians and elders were expected to bear responsibility for restitution and correction.
- **Education and Reintegration:** Justice was seen as a process of guiding children back into the moral and social order.
- **Proportionality and Compassion:** Punishments were scaled down for minors, often limited to restitution, admonishment, or ritual penance.

These principles demonstrate that ancient Indian jurisprudence was far from arbitrary or excessively harsh in dealing with young offenders. Rather, it anticipated many of the insights now central to modern juvenile justice: rehabilitation, community responsibility, and proportionality.

### III. Core Principles of Juvenile Justice in the Indian Knowledge System

The ancient Indian legal and philosophical corpus reveals not only scattered rules but also a coherent set of principles about how children in conflict with norms ought to be treated. These principles go beyond the literal punishments prescribed in texts. They reflect a vision of human development, community responsibility,

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<sup>77</sup> K.M. Ganguli, trans., *The Mahābhārata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa* (Calcutta: Bharata Press, 1896), *Sabha Parva*, Chs. 53–55.

<sup>78</sup> R.C. Dutt, trans., *The Rāmāyaṇa* (Calcutta: Trübner & Co., 1899), *Bāla Kāṇḍa*, Cantos 21–24.

and the relationship between law and morality. What follows are five key principles that emerge from the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) regarding juvenile justice.

### **Justice as Moral Education**

In the IKS worldview, law was never severed from morality. The goal of responding to wrongdoing, especially by the young, was not to inflict suffering but to reorient behavior. Correction was expected to be a form of moral pedagogy.<sup>79</sup> For instance, the teacher's role was not merely to impart knowledge but to mold character. Misbehavior by a pupil was a signal to intensify teaching, not a reason to abandon the child. This approach contrasts with punitive legalism: discipline was framed as an extension of education.

The implication is profound. If the essence of juvenile justice is education, then any form of sanction must be assessed not by how much pain it inflicts but by how effectively it contributes to the child's growth into a responsible adult.

### **Community as the First Court of Justice**

The Indian tradition viewed justice as beginning within the household and radiating outward. P.V. Kane notes that in ancient jurisprudence, households, family elders, and local guilds (*kula*, *sreni*, *gana*) acted as the first tribunals before matters reached the king's court.<sup>80</sup> Parents and teachers bore moral and sometimes legal responsibility for the conduct of their dependents, underscoring that correction was a communal duty rather than a purely state function. Seen through modern eyes, this suggests that effective juvenile justice must engage the family and community, not only formal institutions.

### **Reduced Culpability and the Recognition of Development**

Perhaps the most strikingly modern aspect of IKS is its recognition of reduced culpability for children. Ancient jurists acknowledged that intention (*manas*) and deliberation (*sankalpa*) mattered in judging guilt.<sup>81</sup> A youthful act done in play or ignorance could not be equated with an adult crime committed with malice. This anticipates the psychological insights of modern developmental science, which confirms that adolescents lack the same impulse control and foresight as adults. Thus, the principle that culpability is proportional to maturity is deeply rooted in Indian jurisprudence. It insists that justice must not only weigh the act but also the actor's stage of development.

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Lingat, *Classical Law of India*, 112–15.

<sup>80</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 309–12.

<sup>81</sup> *Nārada Smṛti* 13.14–16, in Julius Jolly, *The Minor Law-Books: Nārada and Brhaspati* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 125–27.

## Restorative Emphasis

Another central principle running through the Indian Knowledge System is the restorative character of justice. The *Dharmasūtras* portray punishment and expiation not as instruments of retribution but as means of moral and social repair. As Patrick Olivelle notes, early law viewed *daṇḍa* (punishment) and *prāyaścitta* (penance) as tools to restore the moral balance disturbed by wrongdoing.<sup>82</sup> When a child or dependent erred, the goal was to heal the breach through restitution, instruction, or ritual purification rather than to sever social bonds. Justice thus sought to reintegrate, not alienate, the offender, anticipating what modern discourse calls restorative justice.

## Dharma as Guiding Ethic

Finally, the overarching framework of juvenile justice in IKS is *dharma*. Unlike modern positive law, which is often narrowly procedural, *dharma* integrates law, ethics, and spirituality. For children, this meant that discipline was never just about legal compliance; it was about aligning with a larger moral order.<sup>83</sup> To punish without compassion would itself violate *dharma*, while to correct with empathy fulfilled both legal and spiritual duties.

This principle resists the fragmentation of justice into technical procedures. It calls for an integrated approach where judges, families, teachers, and communities see themselves as custodians of a child's moral journey, not mere administrators of sanction.

These principles, such as moral education, community responsibility, reduced culpability, restorative healing, and the overarching ethic of *dharma*, form the backbone of how ancient India conceptualized juvenile justice. They provide a framework that is not only historically interesting but normatively relevant. In a society where public anger sometimes pushes for harsher punishments, recalling these principles helps anchor our legal responses in compassion and proportionality. They remind us that justice for children is not about measuring pain but about nurturing potential. By embedding moral growth, social responsibility, and spiritual dignity into the fabric of justice, the Indian Knowledge System offers an enduring resource for shaping humane and culturally resonant juvenile law.

## IV. Modern Juvenile Justice Framework in India

Juvenile justice in India today rests on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The law embodies two parallel concerns: on one hand, the protection and rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law; on the other,

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<sup>82</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 54–57.

<sup>83</sup> Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, 145–47.

society's demand for accountability when crimes committed by adolescents shock the public conscience.

### **The 2015 Act: A Rights-Based Framework**

The JJ Act, 2015, defines a child as any person below 18 years of age.<sup>84</sup> It sets up Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) at the district level to hear cases of children in conflict with the law. Each JJB includes a magistrate and two social workers, reflecting the belief that legal judgment should be balanced with social and rehabilitative insight.<sup>85</sup> Proceedings are meant to be informal, child-friendly, and confidential. The Act also covers “children in need of care and protection” through Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), which decide on foster care, adoption, or other rehabilitation measures.<sup>86</sup> Importantly, institutionalization is a last resort; priority is given to education, counseling, and family reunification.

The most debated provision is Section 15. It allows a preliminary assessment for juveniles aged sixteen to eighteen accused of “heinous offences” (punishable with seven years or more).<sup>87</sup> If the JJB concludes that the child understood the consequences of the act, the case may be transferred to a Children’s Court for trial as an adult. This clause was introduced after the 2012 Delhi gang rape case, where one perpetrator was a juvenile, and it reflects the pressure of public opinion demanding tougher laws. At the same time, the Act affirms several guiding principles: presumption of innocence, best interests of the child, dignity, non-stigmatization, and rehabilitation as the primary aim.<sup>88</sup>

### **Judicial Safeguards and Key Cases**

The Supreme Court has played a decisive role in interpreting juvenile law.

- **Salil Bali v. Union of India (2013).** The Court upheld the constitutional validity of treating all offenders below 18 as juveniles, stressing that juvenile justice is *restorative, not retributive*. It recognized adolescence as a stage of growth where reform remains possible.<sup>89</sup>
- **Dr. Subramanian Swamy v. Raju (2014).** The Court again declined to lower the age of juvenility despite public anger after the Delhi case, emphasizing that reform must prevail over vengeance.<sup>90</sup>
- **Shilpa Mittal v. State of NCT of Delhi (2020).** The Court clarified that offences with a maximum punishment of more than seven years but no

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<sup>84</sup> Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, § 2(12).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, § 4(2).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, § 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, § 15.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, § 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Salil Bali v. Union of India*, (2013) 7 SCC 705.

<sup>90</sup> *Dr. Subramanian Swamy v. Raju*, (2014) 8 SCC 390.

minimum sentence cannot be classified as “heinous.”<sup>91</sup> This narrowed the scope of the adult-trial provision and protected many juveniles from harsher treatment.

These rulings reflect judicial caution in ensuring that children are not pushed prematurely into the adult criminal justice system.

### **International Influence**

India’s framework is influenced by global standards, particularly the UNCRC (1989), which under Article 1 defines a child as under 18 and Articles such as 37 and 40 mandate that children must not face torture, unlawful detention, or capital punishment and should be treated with dignity, ensuring reintegration.<sup>92</sup> The Beijing Rules (1985) also emphasize diversion, proportionality, and child-friendly procedures.<sup>93</sup> These international norms have shaped both the language and the spirit of India’s 2015 Act, especially its commitment to dignity and rehabilitation, though Section 15, by permitting adult trials for older juveniles, remains in tension with the UNCRC’s rehabilitative ethos.

### **Challenges in Practice**

Despite progressive ideals, implementation remains uneven. Observation Homes and Special Homes often face overcrowding and a lack of trained staff.<sup>94</sup> Public discourse, driven by sensational cases, continues to stigmatize juveniles as criminals rather than children in need of reform. And while Section 15 was intended to respond to extreme cases, there is concern that it risks undermining the very philosophy of rehabilitation that the law seeks to preserve.

The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, reflects India’s attempt to combine compassion with accountability. It echoes the ancient Indian emphasis on reform, family responsibility, and reintegration, while also accommodating modern anxieties about crime. The judiciary, through careful interpretation, has worked to protect the rehabilitative essence of the law. Yet the real challenge lies in practice: to ensure that every child in conflict with the law is treated not as a lost cause, but as a person with the capacity for renewal.

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<sup>91</sup> *Shilpa Mittal v. State (NCT of Delhi)*, (2020) 2 SCC 787.

<sup>92</sup> *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted November 20, 1989, GA Res. 44/25, arts. 1, 37, and 40.

<sup>93</sup> *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules)*, GA Res. 40/33, November 29, 1985, rules 1, 5, and 11.

<sup>94</sup> Meghna Vesvikar and Renu Sharma, “The Juvenile Justice System in India: Observation Homes and Current Debates,” in *Cultural Perspectives on Youth Justice*, ed. Elaine Arnall and Darrell Fox (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 185–207.

## V. Comparative Analysis: Indian Knowledge System vs. Modern Juvenile Justice

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, arise from very different worlds. One belongs to an ancient moral-spiritual order where law, ethics, and pedagogy were inseparable; the other operates in a secular, rights-based constitutional democracy deeply influenced by global norms. Yet, despite these different starting points, they converge on certain essential insights about children and wrongdoing. Where they diverge, the contrasts reveal both strengths and blind spots.

### 1. Convergences

#### a. Recognition of Reduced Culpability

Ancient Indian jurists acknowledged that children lack the same intent (*sankalpa*) and maturity as adults.<sup>95</sup> Wrongdoing by a minor was often attributed to immaturity or ignorance, leading to milder sanctions such as admonition, restitution, or penance. The JJ Act likewise presumes juvenility for all under 18, recognizing that developmental immaturity reduces culpability.<sup>96</sup> Both systems, in different idioms, affirm that a child is not merely a “miniature adult” but someone in a transitional stage of growth.

#### b. Emphasis on Rehabilitation

IKS viewed discipline as an extension of education, whether through the *gurukula* system or community correction.<sup>97</sup> The JJ Act also proclaims rehabilitation and reintegration as its guiding principles, with institutionalization as the last resort.<sup>98</sup> In both frameworks, the child’s future, not their past, is the focus.

#### c. Community and Family Responsibility

In ancient texts, families and communities bore responsibility when a child offended; guardians were expected to compensate victims and guide the child back to dharma.<sup>99</sup> Modern law, though state-driven, similarly involves families in rehabilitation, requiring counseling and efforts at reunification.<sup>100</sup> This reflects a continuity of viewing juvenile justice as not only a matter of state punishment but also of social responsibility.

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<sup>95</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 311.

<sup>96</sup> Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, § 2(12).

<sup>97</sup> Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 115–18.

<sup>98</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015*, No. 2 of 2016, § 3(xiii) and (xvi).

<sup>99</sup> Julius Jolly, *The Minor Law-Books: Narada and Brihaspati* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 124.

<sup>100</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015*, No. 2 of 2016, § 39(2).

## d. Restorative Spirit

Both frameworks carry restorative elements. The Dharma sastras stressed restitution and reconciliation to restore social balance.<sup>101</sup> The JJ Act, influenced by the UNCRC and Beijing Rules, likewise emphasizes some restorative practices such as counseling, community service, and victim-offender mediation.<sup>102</sup>

## 2. Divergences

### a. Individual vs. Institutional Orientation

IKS located correction in family, teacher, and community structures. The modern system, by contrast, institutionalizes the process through JJBs, CWCs, Observation Homes, and Special Homes. While this ensures procedural fairness and uniformity, it risks alienating children from the natural networks of care envisioned in traditional models.

### b. Equality and Non-Discrimination

Ancient systems often tied penalties to caste, gender, and social status.<sup>103</sup> Modern law, under the Constitution, rejects such distinctions and upholds equality before the law and prohibits discrimination. This is a crucial divergence: what is retained is the human spirit, but what must be rejected are hierarchical biases.

### c. The “Heinous Offence” Dilemma

Classical jurisprudence did recognize categories of grave wrongdoing, but its spirit remained moral and corrective rather than punitive. The *Manusmṛti* condemns violence as the most wicked of acts, “worse than defamation or theft.”<sup>104</sup> The *Nārada Smṛti* goes further to classify *sāhasa*, literally “bold or violent act”, into four kinds, encompassing manslaughter, robbery, indecent assault and insult, the ancient equivalent of what we might call “heinous offences.”<sup>105</sup> Yet even in these serious cases, punishment was graduated by intent and maturity. IKS did not envision transferring children into adult penal systems. The focus was on restoring *dharma* through recompense, penance, and guidance. In contrast, the JJ Act, under Section 15, authorizes a preliminary assessment to determine whether juveniles aged sixteen to eighteen accused of heinous crimes may be tried as adults.<sup>106</sup> This represents a sharp departure from the ancient ethos: while

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<sup>101</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56–57.

<sup>102</sup> *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (Beijing Rules)*, GA Res. 40/33, November 29, 1985, rules 5 and 17.

<sup>103</sup> Manusmṛti 8.270–75, trans. G. Bühler, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886).

<sup>104</sup> Manusmṛti 8.314, trans. G. Bühler, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886).

<sup>105</sup> *Nārada Smṛti* 14.2, trans. Julius Jolly, *The Minor Law-Books: Nārada and Bṛhaspati* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 202.

<sup>106</sup> *Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act*, 2015, No. 2 of 2016, § 15.

the *Smritis* recognized serious wrongdoing, they never envisioned subjecting the young to adult penal systems.

#### **d. Spiritual vs. Secular Ethic**

IKS embedded juvenile justice in *dharma*, a moral and spiritual order binding the individual to community and cosmos. The modern system, while humane, is secular and procedural, rooted in constitutionalism and international human rights. This divergence is natural given historical shifts, but it also means that the spiritual and ethical dimensions of correction risk being sidelined.

The comparative analysis shows that India's modern juvenile justice system is not alien to its traditions; it echoes them in recognizing reduced culpability, stressing rehabilitation, and valuing social responsibility. Yet divergences remain, particularly around equality, institutionalization, and responses to heinous offences. The challenge is not to romanticize the past but to weave its humane and restorative wisdom into today's constitutional and international framework. In doing so, India can craft a juvenile justice model that is both modern and deeply rooted in its own ethical soil, a system that punishes less to hurt and more to heal, less to stigmatize and more to reform.

### **VI. Reflections and Way Forward**

The journey from *Manu Smriti* to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, reveals a long thread in Indian thought: children who falter should not be abandoned, but guided back to the path of responsibility. Ancient jurists grounded this principle in *dharma*; modern lawmakers frame it in rights and constitutional values. Both, however, recognize the child as a being in transition. The real challenge today is not whether India has good laws; it already does, but how those laws can be animated by cultural wisdom, practical compassion, and institutional commitment. When we place IKS and modern law side by side, certain gaps in policy emerge where traditional wisdom may offer guidance:

#### **Reclaiming the Ethic of Moral Growth**

Modern institutions often emphasize vocational training and legal safeguards, but moral and ethical development is equally critical. Ancient India placed moral education at the heart of correction, whether through a teacher's guidance or ritual atonement. Today, a secular equivalent could be integrated into rehabilitation: curricula that teach empathy, non-violence, civic responsibility, and ethical decision-making. Such programs, adapted from both cultural traditions and modern psychology, could ensure that rehabilitation is not only about skills but also about character.

## **Strengthening Family and Community Roles**

A recurring insight of IKS is that a child is never only an individual; they are always part of a network, whether it is family, kin, neighbourhood, or community.<sup>107</sup> Justice was once enacted within these circles, not in distant courts. Modern law already acknowledges family involvement, but in practice, the burden often falls on institutions alone. Strengthening family counselling, community mentoring, and structured family group conferences could bring back this communal dimension. Programs modelled on *Bal Panchayats*, where elders, children, and victims discuss resolution, would echo traditional practices while meeting modern due process requirements.

## **Reducing Over-Institutionalization**

Observation Homes and Special Homes are essential, but many studies warn that they risk becoming warehouses rather than sanctuaries. Ancient India seldom isolated children from their community; instead, correction happened within the social fold. While full deinstitutionalization is neither possible nor desirable, India can reduce reliance on institutions by investing in foster care, supervised release, and community-based alternatives.<sup>108</sup> This would not only relieve overcrowding but also reaffirm that a child's place is within society, not apart from it.

## **Balancing Public Outrage with Constitutional Morality**

One of the hardest tasks for lawmakers is to resist the pull of public anger when heinous crimes involve minors. The 2012 Delhi case demonstrated how outrage can reshape legislation, leading to the controversial provision of trying older juveniles as adults. Here, IKS offers a quiet reminder: the worth of a society is measured not by how harshly it treats its young in their darkest moments, but by how courageously it offers them a chance to reform. The law must continue to balance deterrence with compassion, guided by constitutional morality rather than mob sentiment.

## **Investing in Human Resources**

Even the most progressive laws fail without capable human actors. Teachers, probation officers, counsellors, and judges need specialized training in child psychology, trauma care, and restorative practices. The IKS ideal of the wise elder or guru as moral guide can be reinterpreted today as the role of trained mentors within juvenile systems. Building this human infrastructure is as important as building institutions.

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<sup>107</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 315–18.

<sup>108</sup> Ahammed Manzoor K, "Juvenile Justice and Correctional Techniques: A Study of Observation and Special Homes in India," *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research (IJLLR)*, April 21, 2025, <https://www.ijllr.com/post/juvenile-justice-and-correctional-techniques-a-study-of-observation-and-special-homes-in-india>

## **Integrating Cultural Narratives into Rehabilitation**

Stories from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, Jataka tales, and folk traditions have long been used in Indian pedagogy to teach moral lessons. Rehabilitation programs could incorporate such cultural narratives, not as religious instruction but as ethical storytelling. This can help children connect their personal struggles with larger lessons of resilience, forgiveness, and transformation. In this way, the cultural roots of IKS can enrich the modern system's rehabilitative efforts.

Juvenile justice in India stands at a crossroads. Its statutory framework is modern and progressive, but its practice often falters under the weight of public anger, resource constraints, and institutional limitations. Looking ahead, the way forward lies in a creative synthesis: retaining constitutional guarantees and global best practices while drawing upon the humane and restorative spirit of India's own knowledge traditions. If rehabilitation is paired with moral growth, if institutions are balanced by community, and if compassion is allowed to temper outrage, India can craft a juvenile justice system that is not only effective but also deeply human. To treat every child as capable of renewal is not only a legal duty but a cultural inheritance and perhaps the truest expression of justice in the Indian tradition.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The treatment of children in conflict with the law has always been a litmus test for a society's values. Ancient Indian jurists, philosophers, and storytellers saw the child not as a criminal to be discarded but as a moral being still in formation, capable of renewal through guidance and community support. Modern India, through the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, enshrines a similar spirit in statutory form, even as it struggles with the pressure of public anger and the demand for accountability.

The comparative journey shows two enduring truths. First, across centuries, India has recognized that children are different from adults; that their mistakes must be corrected, not merely punished. Second, justice for the young requires more than legal codes: it demands families, teachers, communities, and institutions working together to shape character and restore dignity.

Yet challenges remain. The inclusion of provisions allowing juveniles between sixteen and eighteen to be tried as adults has introduced a fracture in the rehabilitative philosophy. It is in violation of constitutional as well as international obligations of India. Implementation gaps in Observation Homes and Special Homes reveal that compassion in law is not always compassion in practice. And the drumbeat of punitive sentiment risks drowning out the quieter voice of reform.

This is where the Indian Knowledge System can continue to serve as a guide. By reminding us that discipline must be inseparable from empathy, that community

must share responsibility for correction, and that every child deserves a chance to reclaim their place in society, IKS offers a moral compass. It does not provide ready-made solutions for today's complex world, but it does provide principles that remain timeless: balance, proportion, compassion, and responsibility.

The way forward is not to romanticize the past, nor to uncritically imitate global norms, but to craft a uniquely Indian approach, one that is modern in its constitutional commitments and global in its rights-based orientation, yet deeply rooted in the humane wisdom of our own tradition. To affirm that every child, no matter how grave their mistake, carries within them the possibility of transformation is perhaps the most profound expression of justice. It is this belief, sustained across centuries from dharmic texts to constitutional law, that can ensure India's juvenile justice system remains both effective and compassionate.

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### **Brief Profile of Author**

**Aparajita Gupta** is an Advocate on Roll (AOR) at the Madhya Pradesh High Court and currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Law at St. Aloysius Institute of Technology (Law), Jabalpur. She has previously worked as District Legal Advisor to the Human Rights Protection Cell and continues to remain deeply involved in causes relating to justice and human dignity. Aparajita holds an LL.M. from Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya, Jabalpur, and has qualified the UGC-NET in Law twice. Her academic and professional journey reflects a constant effort to blend the study of law with compassion and ethical reflection. She has presented papers at national and international conferences and published in reputed legal journals. Passionate about teaching and research, she believes that law is not merely a system of rules but a living instrument for empathy, reform and social transformation.

**Mob.** +91 9424693002

**E-mail** – guptaaparajita98@gmail.com

## 18.

# Linking Indian Knowledge system (of Tribe) with environment protection through Intellectual Property Right

Mrs. Preeti Tukaram Pawar\Sawale

Asst. Prof.

Dr. D.Y. Patil

Law College, Pimpri, Pune

ppreeti82@gmail.com

9657912200

C-508, Aksha Vrundawan,

near city pride school, Chikhali, Pune 411062

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### Abstract

*The Indian Knowledge System<sup>109</sup> represents a vast and diverse reservoir of traditional wisdom, philosophical thought, and indigenous practices that have developed over millennia. It covers a wide range of disciplines such as the Vedas and Upanishads (ancient scriptures), Ayurveda (healing sciences), Yoga and Tantra (spiritual and meditative traditions), Jyotish (astrology), Vastu Shastra (architecture), Gandhian philosophy (non-violence and self-reliance), and tribal as well as folk knowledge systems. These traditions continue to provide meaningful guidance for present-day challenges, particularly in areas like sustainable development, ecological preservation, health, education, and social empowerment. The Indian worldview emphasizes harmony with nature, collective well-being, holistic health, local self-sufficiency, and environmental responsibility. In this sense, IKS contributes significantly to the pursuit of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, especially those concerning poverty eradication (SDG 1), good health and well-being (SDG 3), and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). The ancient principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—“the world is one family”—from the Maha Upanishad, highlights the interconnectedness of all living beings and strongly resonates with contemporary global sustainability efforts. Historically, India was a centre of learning with institutions like Nalanda and Takshashila attracting scholars from across the world. The IKS, comprising Jnana (knowledge), Vijnana (science), and Jeevan Darshan (philosophy of life), was built on careful observation, experimentation, and reflection. It not only shaped Indian society but also offers enduring, eco-conscious, and people-centric solutions to today's global issues.*

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<sup>109</sup> (IKS)

## **Environment conservation under the Indian Knowledge System**

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in ancient India were fundamentally rooted in an ethos of ecological harmony. Water conservation, agricultural methods, and architectural principles were meticulously designed to align with local ecosystems, promoting resource efficiency and long-term environmental equilibrium.

### **Environmental concern of the Indian knowledge system includes the following two points:**

- **Water Management:** Sophisticated structures such as stepwells, reservoirs, and rainwater harvesting techniques provided sustainable water security in water-scarce areas.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Techniques including crop rotation, organic cultivation, and the application of natural fertilizers (like cow dung) were essential for preserving soil health and agricultural biodiversity.

These time-tested approaches directly support modern global goals for clean water (SDG 6) and terrestrial ecosystem conservation (SDG 15).

## **Traditional knowledge of the Tribe, Environmental Conservation, and Intellectual Property Rights**

### **1. The Soliga tribe**

The Soliga tribe, indigenous to the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, exemplifies a symbiotic relationship with nature. Their traditional practices, deeply rooted in ecological knowledge, contribute significantly to forest conservation. Their shifting cultivation ('podu') enriches the soil with ash, and the abandoned plots provide food and water for wildlife, while their presence deters poachers. Their sustainable harvesting of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) ensures they only collect ripe fruits and berries, leaving ample resources for other forest species. Podu cultivation enriches soil fertility naturally through ash and organic matter, avoids chemical inputs, and supports biodiversity by providing food and habitat to animals even after abandonment.

The Soligas possess extensive environmental knowledge, identifying 96 wild edible plants and 118 medicinal species. This biodiversity is crucial for their nutritional security, providing them with a diverse, vitamin-rich diet year-round and preventing malnutrition. This ecological wisdom forms an integral part of IKS. Soligas hold remarkable traditional knowledge, identifying numerous plant species, forecasting weather, and maintaining eco-friendly resource use. They emphasize that occasional forest fires naturally control invasive species like lantana, which otherwise threaten local biodiversity.

Their diet depends heavily on wild edible plants (WFPs), mushrooms, tubers, fruits, and leaves, providing essential nutrition and food security.

## **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) concern of the Soligas tribe**

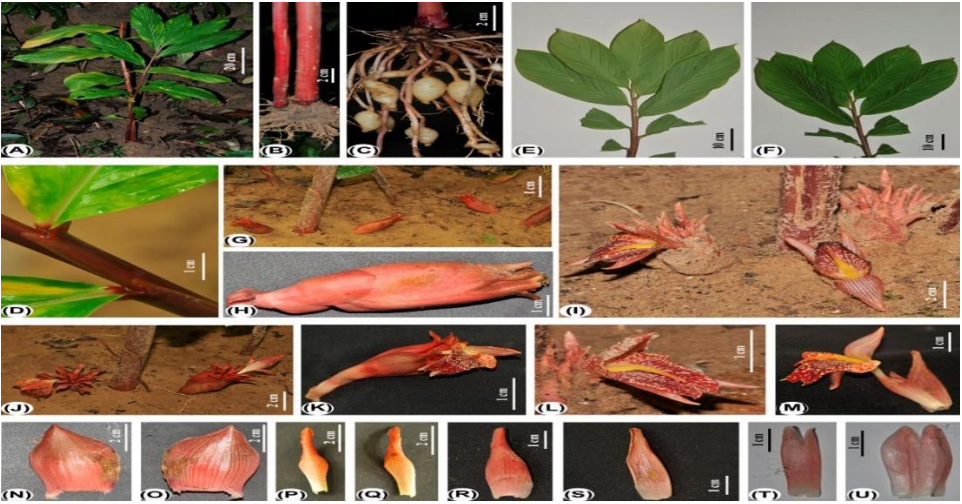
The Soliga community's ecological knowledge is vulnerable to biopiracy and misappropriation, particularly concerning medicinal plants, wild edibles, and sustainable farming practices. We can protect Intellectual Property Rights of soligas in the following ways

- Unique forest products like Soliga honey or amla can be protected through **Geographical Indications**
- A document relating to medicinal plant knowledge can be registered in the **Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)** and prevent misappropriation through false patents.
- Benefit-sharing mechanisms under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**, and the **Nagoya Protocol** can ensure that if pharmaceutical or agricultural companies use Soliga knowledge, the community is compensated.

## **2. Shompen of Great Nicobar Island**

The Great Nicobar Island is recognized as a biodiversity hotspot, home to several rare, endangered, and endemic plant species. For generations, the Shompen tribes have wisely and sustainably utilized the island's rich flora and fauna. When felling trees, the Shompen cut the trunks about 5–6 metres above the ground rather than at the base. This practice not only saves time but also allows the trees to regenerate more quickly. Their use of bees further illustrates their skill in managing forest resources. Hollow tree trunks provide natural protection for beehives from rain, and the Shompen identify such trunks by tapping them with their machetes. Once a hollow is found, they make a small opening, encouraging bees to settle and build hives. After a few weeks, they return to harvest the honey.

Scientists from the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) recently discovered a new species of Zingiber (ginger) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Interestingly, this plant was already known to the local Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Nicobar, who had long recognized its medicinal value. The Shompen and Nicobarese communities, for example, use different parts of the plant as a bee repellent and a natural tranquilizer.



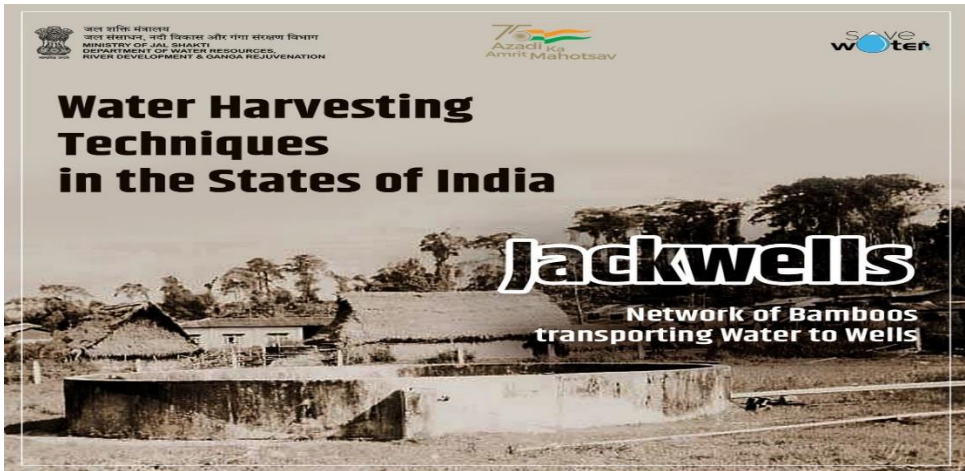
**A new species of *Zingiber* (ginger) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands<sup>110</sup>**

Research indicates that they gather around 18 varieties of wild food plants and 19 medicinal plants, including fruits, leaves, tubers, and seeds. Many of these wild plants are also used in traditional healing practices to treat ailments such as fever, stomach disorders, bone fractures, postnatal conditions, headaches, body aches, and various skin diseases. As part of their indigenous ecological knowledge, the Shompen fashion cooking vessels from tree bark to boil pandanus and deliberately choose fire-resistant plant species for this purpose, reflecting their adaptive use of local biodiversity.

**Water conservation techniques**

Living in rugged topography, the Shompen developed a unique jack well system for rainwater harvesting. Split bamboo channels are placed under trees to collect leaf runoff, which is directed into small pits forming jack wells. These wells are interconnected, with overflow from smaller ones feeding into larger ones, eventually leading to the main jack well.

<sup>110</sup> <https://nsojournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/njb.01045>



Shompen’s jack well system for rainwater harvesting<sup>111</sup>

### Linking with IPR-

Shompen’s traditional ecological knowledge remains vulnerable in the absence of recognition and legal safeguards. Here, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) frameworks, particularly those related to Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Geographical Indications (GI), become crucial. Their legal rights are protected in the following ways.

**Traditional Knowledge:** Their long-standing medicinal use of plants, such as the newly identified Zingiber species, highlights how tribal knowledge often predates formal scientific discovery. Recognizing such knowledge through TK databases can prevent biopiracy and ensure proper attribution.

**Community Rights under Biodiversity Laws:** The Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and the Nagoya Protocol stress equitable benefit-sharing with local and indigenous communities. Documenting Shompen practices within IKS frameworks can provide them with legal standing to claim benefits if their knowledge is commercialized.

**IPR and Protection of Cultural Heritage:** The Shompen’s innovations—like bamboo-based rainwater harvesting systems and fire-resistant bark utensils—illustrate “innovation within tradition.” These can be protected under IPR mechanisms tailored for collective knowledge rather than individual inventorship, ensuring preservation of cultural identity and ecological wisdom.

<sup>111</sup> [https://x.com/PIB\\_India/status/1489499240204148736](https://x.com/PIB_India/status/1489499240204148736)

### 3. Andamanese Tribes in Disaster Prediction

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, located in a seismically active zone, have often been vulnerable to cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis. The indigenous tribes of the region—including the Onge, Jarawa, Great Andamanese, and Nicobarese—have survived these extreme events for centuries by relying on their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), passed orally through generations.

**The tribes predict natural disasters through close observation of ecological signals:**

**The following are certain techniques**

- **Sea and Wind Patterns:** Sudden retreat of the sea or unusual rise in water levels signals an impending tsunami. Changes in wind direction and intensity are associated with cyclones.
- **Animal Behaviour:** Unusual movement of birds, turtles, and wild animals is seen as a warning of impending disaster. Before the 2004 tsunami, the tribes noticed wild animals moving inland, away from the coast, and followed them to safety.
- **Sky and Cloud Reading:** Formation of cloud types, sudden changes in temperature, and unusual silence of the sea are interpreted as early signs of storms.

#### **Case of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami**

A well-documented instance of this knowledge in action was during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. While thousands perished along the Indian coast, the mortality among the Andamanese tribes was minimal. The Onge tribe (with only about 100 members at the time) moved swiftly to higher ground after observing changes in the sea and animal behaviour.

The Nicobarese used their traditional knowledge of high-ground shelters, shifting entire villages inland. This demonstrates that indigenous disaster prediction practices are not merely symbolic but practical, time-tested systems of environmental monitoring and response.

#### **Linking to IPR**

Their knowledge represents a sophisticated environmental understanding that complements modern disaster management systems.

**IPR Protection:** Recognizing their oral traditions as intellectual property ensures that these communities receive due respect and protection from exploitation, especially when their knowledge is studied or incorporated into scientific disaster management frameworks.

**Policy Integration:** Documenting and integrating such indigenous warning systems into India's disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies can create hybrid models of resilience.

#### **4. Lepchas of Sikkim**

The Lepcha community, primarily residing in the mountain ranges of Sikkim, identifies itself as Rongkup or Runkup, meaning “children of the snowy peaks.” Their oldest body of traditional wisdom is preserved in the tale of Tamsangthing, which records extensive knowledge about the medicinal uses of plants.

Bamboo, locally known as poo, grows abundantly in their habitat and is central to Lepcha life. It is employed in the construction of eco-friendly cane bridges, rafts, houses, utensils, and even musical instruments, showcasing sustainable technology. Historically, bamboo seeds also served as a resource for making fermented drinks and bread during food shortages. Their conservation ethic is evident in the traditional practice of Bukchung, which mandates planting eight saplings for every tree felled, ensuring ecological balance.

The Lepchas also possess an impressive repository of ethnomedicinal knowledge, orally transmitted across generations. They are familiar with remedies for approximately 62 diseases, including serious ailments like tuberculosis, asthma, bronchitis, malaria, cholera, dysentery, measles, typhoid, and ulcers. More than 44 plants are used for medicinal purposes, with notable applications in antiasthmatic and antitubercular treatments. Strikingly, they prefer using non-lethal plant parts—such as flowers, bark, leaves, and seeds—over roots, to protect plant survival. Depending on the nature of the remedy, plants are either consumed fresh or preserved by sun-drying or salting in bamboo containers.

#### **Disaster management**

The Lepchas’ intimate connection with nature enables them to predict natural disasters through careful observation of ecological cues. For example, when birds sing loudly and gather in flocks, it signifies fair weather, whereas their silence is taken as a sign of impending rain or storms. A sudden, unusual movement of birds is interpreted as an indication of forest fires. Likewise, the flowering of specific bamboo species is regarded as a warning of an approaching famine. Changes in the behaviour of pheasants and small animals such as shrews, martens, and weasels are understood to signal natural hazards like earthquakes. Such observations form part of their traditional disaster mitigation strategies.

#### **The architecture of Lepcha houses**

The architecture of Lepcha houses also reflects their adaptive knowledge. Built entirely of wood, these dwellings are designed to resist earthquakes and landslides by following the principle of balance and centre of gravity. Typically, the houses are square in shape, with a strong central pillar supported by eight additional pillars placed on smooth stone bases. This raised-pillar construction ensures stability: in the event of floods or landslides, water drains through the spaces between the pillars, preventing the structure from sliding away.



**Traditional Lepcha House** <sup>112</sup>

### **IPR Relevance to Lepcha Knowledge**

While the Lepchas' ecological and medicinal wisdom represents invaluable intellectual contributions, it faces the risk of erosion and misappropriation unless safeguarded under Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) frameworks.

**Nagoya Protocol:** At the global level, the Lepchas' ethnobotanical and ecological knowledge is protected under the Protocol, which mandates Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS).

**Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL):** Documenting Lepcha medicinal knowledge in TKDL can help prevent wrongful patent claims while ensuring recognition of their contributions.

**Geographical Indications (GI):** Unique cultural practices such as bamboo-based architecture (house), instruments, and fermented products from bamboo seeds may qualify for GI status, offering collective protection.

### **5. Birhors of Jharkhand**

The Birhors, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, are primarily concentrated in Jharkhand, with smaller populations in parts of Chhattisgarh and West Bengal.

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<sup>112</sup> <https://steemit.com/travel/@himalayatour/visit-of-a-lepcha-tribal-village-in-the-sikkim-himalayas>

They are renowned for their rich ethnobotanical knowledge, possessing detailed insights into the medicinal and nutritional properties of numerous forest plants. Each plant is distinctly classified in its native language. For example, the root paste of Ratti is traditionally used to treat ailments such as leucorrhoea, menstrual disorders, and headaches.



**Ratti Plant** <sup>113</sup>

A striking aspect of Birhor culture is their indigenous rope-making craft. Initially developed for subsistence purposes—such as hunting, restraining animals, and extracting honey—this technique has gradually evolved into a commercial skill, reflecting both cultural continuity and adaptation to changing economic contexts.

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<sup>113</sup> <https://www.dabur.com/ayurveda/ayurvedic-medicinal-plants/ratti>



**rope-making craft<sup>114</sup>**

The Birhor community utilises a wide variety of animals—including deer, rats, Indian banded krait, pigeons, snails, common oysters, toads, frogs, rabbits, Bengal black turtles, bronze-winged jacanas, green mussels, lemurs, monkeys, bats, and squirrels—for both nutritional and medicinal purposes. Importantly, they either make use of animals that have died naturally or hunt in ways that maintain ecological balance, ensuring minimal disruption to their environment. The Birhor are also skilled in snake handling, particularly capturing species such as cobras and Indian banded kraits to extract venom for medicinal use. Scientific research has demonstrated that venom from the Indian banded krait can have applications in cancer treatment, and certain snake venoms are potential sources for developing antibiotics, highlighting the medical significance of Birhor traditional knowledge.

### **IPR and the Protection of Birhor Knowledge**

**Nagoya Protocol:** Globally, the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing provides a mechanism for recognising community rights over genetic resources and traditional knowledge, ensuring the Birhors' consent and benefit-sharing.

**Geographical Indications (GI) and Craft Protection:** The Birhors' traditional rope-making technique may qualify for collective protection under GI or other community IPR systems, preserving it as a cultural heritage and promoting it as a sustainable livelihood practice.

**Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL):** Inclusion of Birhor ethnobotanical knowledge in the TKDL would help prevent global biopiracy and wrongful patenting.

### **6. Kani tribe of the Western Ghats, Kerala.**

A significant example of benefit-sharing with indigenous communities is seen in the case of the Kani tribe of the Western Ghats, Kerala. During a botanical survey by scientists from the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research

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<sup>114</sup> <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2356100/>

Institute (TBGRI), researchers noticed that the Kani tribals consumed the fruit of a plant called Arogyapacha (*Trichopus zeylanicus*). Traditionally, the community had long relied on this plant for enhancing stamina and reducing weakness during energetic activities.



*Arogyapacha (Trichopus zeylanicus)*<sup>115</sup>

Subsequent scientific studies confirmed that Arogyapacha contained glycolipids and other bioactive compounds with therapeutic properties. In 1987, TBGRI successfully developed a herbal formulation called ‘Jeevani’, based on this traditional knowledge. Recognizing the role of the Kani community, a formal benefit-sharing agreement was signed, under which the institute committed to share license fees equally (50:50) with the tribe. Additionally, the agreement provided that 2% of the royalties from the sale of Jeevani would go directly to the Kani community.

## **7. Apatani Tribes of Ziro Valley and IPR-environment concern**

The Apatani system of wet-rice cultivation combined with aquaculture in Ziro Valley represents a living example of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), where indigenous wisdom, ecological ethics, and sustainable practices converge. Their intricate irrigation networks, organic soil-enrichment methods, pest management

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/PlantWealthofIndia/posts/9351502098246008/>

through aquaculture, and waste recycling demonstrate how traditional ecological knowledge ensures both food security and biodiversity conservation. Unlike modern intensive agriculture, the Apatani method is not resource-extractive but resource-replenishing, rooted in a philosophy of co-existence with nature—a core value of IKS.



**Apatani system of wet-rice cultivation<sup>116</sup>**

However, despite its global recognition as one of the most productive and sustainable traditional farming systems, the Apatani knowledge system remains largely unprotected under current Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regimes. Since this knowledge has been transmitted orally across generations and practiced communally, it falls under Traditional Knowledge (TK), which often lacks legal ownership in conventional IPR frameworks. This exposes their practices and associated biodiversity (such as indigenous rice and fish varieties) to risks of biopiracy and commercial exploitation without adequate benefit-sharing.

In this context, the Apatani knowledge system highlights the urgent need to strengthen mechanisms such as the Geographical Indications of Goods (GI Act, 1999), Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), and access and benefit-sharing (ABS) provisions under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. Protecting their agricultural innovations through sui generis IPR frameworks would not only safeguard their rights but also ensure the recognition and fair compensation of indigenous contributions to global sustainability.

Thus, the Apatani case illustrates the intersection of IKS and IPR: while their ecological knowledge reflects India's intellectual and cultural heritage, its protection requires adapting modern legal frameworks to acknowledge the collective and intergenerational nature of traditional wisdom.

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<sup>116</sup> <https://www.fao.org/climate-smart-agriculture-sourcebook/production-resources/module-b7-soil/b7-case-studies/case-study-b7-3/fr/>

## Conclusion

The case studies of the Shompens of Great Nicobar, Lepchas of Sikkim, Birhors of Jharkhand, and Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh demonstrate that tribal communities across India are living repositories of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Their practices—ranging from sustainable agriculture, ethnomedicine, ecological construction, wildlife management, and disaster prediction—are deeply rooted in symbiotic relationships with nature. These indigenous traditions not only sustain their livelihoods but also contribute significantly to environmental conservation, biodiversity protection, and climate resilience.

However, a common thread across these diverse case studies is the invisibility of tribal knowledge in modern Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) frameworks. Since traditional knowledge is oral, communal, and intergenerational, it does not align with the individualistic and novelty-driven structure of conventional IPR laws. This gap has left tribal innovations—whether the Apatani's rice–fish cultivation system, the Birhors' snake venom applications, the Lepchas' eco-friendly bamboo technology, or the Shompens' ethnobotanical wisdom—vulnerable to biopiracy, misappropriation, and commercial exploitation without fair recognition or benefit-sharing.

Therefore, the intersection of IKS, environment, and IPR demands a paradigm shift. Legal mechanisms such as the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, the Geographical Indications of Goods (GI Act, 1999), and the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) must be strengthened and adapted to recognize the collective ownership and ecological value of indigenous knowledge systems. Equally important is the active involvement of local communities in decision-making, ensuring that conservation policies and benefit-sharing mechanisms are rooted in their rights and perspectives.

In essence, protecting tribal knowledge through a *sui generis* IPR framework is not just about safeguarding cultural heritage but also about acknowledging its global relevance for sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation. The lived wisdom of these communities illustrates that IKS is not a relic of the past but a future-oriented model of coexistence between humans and nature.

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## 19.

# Atithi Devo Bhava in Practice: Indian Knowledge Systems Guiding Hospitality & Tourism Laws

**Mr. Hitesh Kadiyan**

*Assistant Professor of Hotel Management  
School of Hotel Management, Starex University, Gurugram*

**Dr. Rajni Kaushal**

*Assistant Professor of Law  
School of Law, Starex University, Gurugram*

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### **Abstract**

*India's ancient wisdom continues to shape contemporary hospitality and tourism practices, with the principle of Atithi Devo Bhava- "The Guest is Like God" remaining central to service ethics. This study explores how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), encompassing classical literature, cultural traditions, wellness practices, and philosophical teachings, influence modern tourism policies, hospitality education, and service delivery. Drawing from texts like the Vedas and the Dharmashastras, it highlights moral obligations toward guests and connects these values to initiatives such as the Incredible India and Dekho Apna Desh campaigns, which promote tourism through cultural ethos. The integration of wellness traditions like Ayurveda, Yoga, and Naturopathy into travel experiences reflects India's holistic approach to tourism. However, the study identifies gaps in embedding IKS into hospitality laws and training modules, noting that many programs still rely on Western frameworks. To address this, the paper proposes incorporating classical teachings, regional customs, and traditional etiquette into curricula and service standards. It advocates collaboration between government bodies and academic institutions to develop culturally rooted guidelines and ethical codes. By aligning tradition with modern governance, India can offer authentic, immersive, and sustainable tourism experiences. The study concludes that embracing indigenous values can enrich service quality and strengthen India's global tourism identity.*

**Key words:** *Atithi Devo Bhava, Indian Knowledge Systems, Hospitality Laws, Cultural Tourism, Tourism Policy.*

### **1. Introduction**

India's hospitality and tourism sectors are globally recognized for their warmth and depth of cultural engagement. Beyond the material infrastructure of hotels, guides, and curated travel experiences lies a centuries-old philosophical tradition that treats guests not as customers, but

as sacred participants in the social and spiritual fabric of the host culture. The Sanskrit phrase *Atithi Devo Bhava*, translating to “**The guest is like God,**” expresses this ethos. While often quoted in tourism campaigns, the phrase originates in ancient Indian scriptures and symbolizes a deep-seated moral obligation. With India’s expanding global presence and the rapid growth of inbound tourism, traditional frameworks rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer unique value propositions. They are not just cultural relics but living systems of thought and practice that can enhance tourism’s ethical dimensions. This chapter initiates a re-examination of ancient hospitality wisdom in light of contemporary policy developments, hospitality training, and service delivery.

Modern travelers are increasingly seeking authenticity, well-being, and cultural depth criteria that are naturally met by India’s traditional values, yet often underutilized in formal tourism governance. Richards (2018)<sup>117</sup> and Kumari, Yadav, & Sharma (2022)<sup>118</sup> emphasize the importance of cultural storytelling and immersive wellness experiences. Integrating indigenous frameworks into policy and law could transform tourism from a commercial transaction into a culturally rooted and emotionally resonant exchange.

Government campaigns like “Incredible India” and “Dekho Apna Desh” have attempted to bridge tradition and tourism branding. However, as noted in OECD’s *Tourism Trends and Policies 2024*<sup>119</sup>, these efforts often remain superficial, failing to embed deeper values into legal codes and education. A meaningful evolution of India’s hospitality landscape must involve IKS not just in rhetoric but in regulation and pedagogy. This study thus seeks to evaluate how *Atithi Devo Bhava* operates in modern Indian tourism and hospitality systems, examine legal and educational frameworks for traditional integration, and propose actionable strategies for embedding Indian ethos into tourism policy and hospitality training. By connecting ancient wisdom with contemporary governance, India has the potential to redefine sustainable tourism in culturally enriching ways.

## 2. *Atithi Devo Bhava*: Philosophical Foundations

The phrase *Atithi Devo Bhava*, meaning “The Guest is God,” is not merely a cultural idiom but a profound ethical and spiritual principle rooted in Indian philosophy. Its origins trace back to the **Taittiriya Upanishad**, where the concept of hospitality is elevated to a sacred duty. In this worldview, the guest (*atithi*) is

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<sup>117</sup> Richards, G. W. 2018. “Cultural Tourism: A Review of Recent Research and Trends.” *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 36: 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.03.005>.

<sup>118</sup> Kumari, P., Yadav, Y., and Sharma, K. C. 2022. “Pittala (Brass) in Traditional Indian Knowledge System: A Review.” *International Journal of Ayurveda and Pharma Research* 10 (2): 45–52.

<sup>119</sup> OECD. 2024. *Tourism Trends and Policies 2024*. [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2024\\_80885d8b-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2024_80885d8b-en.html).

not just a visitor but a manifestation of divinity, deserving of reverence, care, and protection (Kaur, 2025<sup>120</sup>; Soni, 2024<sup>121</sup>).

This chapter explores the philosophical underpinnings of Atithi Devo Bhava, examining its textual origins, ethical implications, and relevance in contemporary hospitality discourse. It also highlights how this principle has evolved from a household virtue to a national tourism ethos, shaping India's identity in global hospitality.

## 2.1 Etymology and Scriptural Origins

The term *atithi* literally means “without a fixed date,” referring to a guest who arrives unexpectedly. *Devo* translates to “god,” and *bhava* implies “to become” or “to regard as.” Together, the phrase urges the host to treat guests with the same respect and devotion as they would a deity (Ashokan, 2025)<sup>122</sup>. This sentiment is echoed in the **Manusmriti**, which outlines the duties of a householder, including daily rituals of guest reception and nourishment (Soni, 2024).

The **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** also reinforce this ideal. In the Mahabharata, Yudhishtira's unwavering hospitality during the Rajasuya Yagna exemplifies the dharmic obligation to serve guests, even at great personal cost. These texts frame hospitality not as transactional but as a moral imperative tied to one's spiritual progress.

## 2.2 Ethical Dimensions of Hospitality

Unlike Western hospitality models that often emphasize service efficiency and commercial value, the Indian approach is deeply ethical and relational. Hospitality is viewed as a form of *seva* (selfless service), where the host's role is to ensure the guest's physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort (Paul & Paul, 2025)<sup>123</sup>. This aligns with the broader Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which prioritize harmony, duty (*dharma*), and interconnectedness.

In contemporary hospitality education, these ethical dimensions are often underrepresented. While service standards focus on professionalism and customer satisfaction, they rarely address the moral and spiritual aspects of guest care.

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<sup>120</sup> Kaur, Sandeep. 2025. “Reviving Roots: Indian Knowledge System and Modern Pedagogical Practices.” *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* 12 (5): 493-498.

<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR2505B40.pdf>.

<sup>121</sup> Soni, R. 2024. “Sanatanology as Indian Knowledge System.” *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 12 (1): 88–951

<sup>122</sup> Ashokan, G. 2025. “Ideas of Contemporariness and Friendship: Re-imagining Democracy in Abdul Bismillah's Atithi Devo Bhava.” *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* 16 (1): 385–399. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14974239>.

<sup>123</sup> Paul, S. K., and Paul, S. 2025. “The Role of Indian Knowledge Systems in Sustainable Environmental Practices: Insights from Indigenous Traditions.” *International Journal of Environmental Sciences* 11 (19s): 296–304. <https://doi.org/10.64252/334zd313>.

Integrating Atithi Devo Bhava into training modules can foster empathy, cultural sensitivity, and ethical decision-making among hospitality professionals (Kaur, 2025).

### 2.3 From Household Virtue to National Ethos

The transformation of Atithi Devo Bhava from a domestic virtue to a national tourism slogan reflects its enduring relevance. The **Ministry of Tourism** adopted the phrase as part of the Incredible India campaign to promote cultural hospitality and train service providers in ethical guest handling (Bhatt et al., 2024)<sup>124</sup>. This initiative includes sensitization programs for taxi drivers, hotel staff, and tour guides, emphasizing respect, cleanliness, and courtesy.

However, critics argue that the campaign often lacks depth, treating *Atithi Devo Bhava* as a branding tool rather than a philosophical framework. To truly embody this principle, tourism policies must go beyond slogans and incorporate ethical training, community engagement, and cultural immersion (OECD, 2024).

### 2.4 Contemporary Interpretations and Challenges

In modern India, the practice of Atithi Devo Bhava faces challenges due to urbanization, commercialization, and changing social norms. The rise of digital hospitality platforms and standardized service models has diluted the personal touch and cultural richness of traditional hosting. Moreover, safety concerns and socio-economic disparities complicate the spontaneous hospitality once common in rural settings (Bhatt et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, there is a growing movement to revive and reinterpret *Atithi Devo Bhava* in ways that align with contemporary realities. Scholars advocate for a “living tradition” approach, where ancient values are adapted to modern contexts without losing their essence (Ashokan, 2025; Paul & Paul, 2025).

## 3. Indian Knowledge Systems

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) represent a vast and interconnected body of traditional wisdom that spans disciplines such as philosophy, medicine, architecture, ethics, linguistics, and ecology. Rooted in centuries of intellectual and spiritual inquiry, IKS offers a holistic worldview that emphasizes harmony, duty (*dharma*), and interconnectedness. In the context of hospitality and tourism, these systems provide a culturally rich framework for ethical service, wellness integration, and sustainable travel experiences (Kaur, 2025; Paul & Paul, 2025<sup>7</sup>).

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<sup>124</sup> Bhatt, S., Pathak, D., Kusum, K., Mohanty, P., and Joshi, K. 2024. “An Exploratory Study on Indian Traditional Hospitality ‘Atithi Devo Bhava’ in Uttarakhand’s Rural Areas Post-Pandemic Using Data Science.” AIP Conference Proceedings 2816 (1): 070007. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0178592>.

### 3.1 Defining Indian Knowledge Systems

IKS is not a monolithic concept but a constellation of indigenous traditions that evolved through oral transmission, classical texts, and experiential learning. It includes Ayurveda, Yoga, Vaastu Shastra, Vedanta, Dharmashastra, and more. These systems are deeply embedded in Indian society and continue to influence daily life, education, and governance (Kaur, 2025<sup>4</sup>; Khan & Sharma, 2024<sup>125</sup>).

Ayurveda, for example, promotes balance between body, mind, and environment, a principle that aligns with wellness tourism. Vaastu Shastra guides spatial harmony in architecture, influencing the design of heritage hotels and spiritual retreats. Vedanta and Dharmashastra offer ethical frameworks that can inform hospitality laws and service standards (Tiwari, 2023<sup>126</sup>).

### 3.2 Philosophical Foundations and Hospitality Ethics

The philosophical roots of IKS emphasize *Atman* (self), *Dharma* (duty), and *Rta* (cosmic order). These concepts foster a sense of responsibility toward others, including guests. Hospitality is viewed as a sacred duty, not a commercial transaction. The host is expected to provide not just physical comfort but emotional and spiritual nourishment (Soni, 2024).

This ethical orientation contrasts with Western hospitality models that prioritize efficiency and profit. By integrating IKS into hospitality training, institutions can cultivate empathy, cultural sensitivity, and ethical decision-making among service providers (Kaur, 2025<sup>4</sup>; Khan & Sharma, 2024).

### 3.3 IKS in Contemporary Education and Policy

The **National Education Policy (2020)** advocates for the integration of IKS into mainstream curricula, including hospitality and tourism education. Specialized modules on Ayurveda, Yoga, and Indian philosophy are being developed to enrich academic programs and promote holistic learning (Ministry of Education, 2020<sup>127</sup>). However, implementation remains uneven. Many institutions lack trained faculty, standardized curricula, and digital resources to support IKS integration. Teacher training programs and interdisciplinary research are essential to overcome these barriers (Kaur, 2025<sup>4</sup>; Bajpai, 2020<sup>128</sup>).

### 3.4 Cultural Identity and Global Relevance

IKS is not just relevant to India it contributes to global discourses on sustainability, wellness, and ethical governance. Practices like Ayurveda and Yoga have gained

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<sup>125</sup> Khan, S., and Sharma, M. 2024. "An Overview of Indian Knowledge System." *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities* 12 (1): 55–63.

<sup>126</sup> Tiwari, S. 2023. "Yoga in Indian Knowledge Systems." *Knowledgeable Research: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 9 (3): 112–120.

<sup>127</sup> Ministry of Education. 2020. *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.

<sup>128</sup> Bajpai, R. 2020. "Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge in Indian Education: Challenges and Opportunities." *Journal of Indian Education* 46 (2): 15–28.

international recognition, attracting tourists seeking meaningful and transformative experiences (Paul & Paul, 2025<sup>7</sup>; Kumari et al., 2022<sup>2</sup>).

By positioning IKS as a foundation for hospitality and tourism, India can offer culturally immersive experiences that resonate with global travelers. This approach also empowers local communities to preserve and share their heritage, fostering inclusive and sustainable tourism (Richards, 2018<sup>129</sup>; Khan & Sharma, 2024<sup>9</sup>).

#### 4. Classical Texts and Hospitality Ethics

Hospitality in India is not merely a social custom it is a sacred duty deeply embedded in classical literature and religious texts. Ancient scriptures such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Manusmriti*, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana* articulate a moral framework that elevates the act of hosting to a spiritual obligation. These texts offer ethical guidance that continues to influence Indian hospitality practices, both informally in households and formally in tourism and service industries.

##### 4.1 Vedic and Upanishadic Foundations

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* famously declares “Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava, Acharya Devo Bhava, Atithi Devo Bhava,” placing the guest (*atithi*) alongside parents and teachers in the hierarchy of reverence (Soni, 2024<sup>5</sup>). This verse underscores the spiritual significance of hospitality, framing it as a path to personal virtue and societal harmony.

The *Rigveda* also contains hymns that emphasize generosity and the moral duty of welcoming strangers. These teachings promote values such as compassion, humility, and service qualities that are essential in modern hospitality training (Kaur, 2025<sup>4</sup>).

##### 4.2 Dharmashastra and Manusmriti

The *Manusmriti*, a foundational text in Hindu law, outlines the responsibilities of a householder, including the daily ritual of feeding and honoring guests. *Manusmriti* describes the guest as a carrier of divine blessings and mandates that they be served with food, shelter, and respect, regardless of their social status (Sharma, 2023<sup>130</sup>).

These prescriptions are not limited to domestic settings they offer a blueprint for ethical hospitality that can inform service standards, legal codes, and training curricula. The emphasis on non-discrimination, generosity, and ritual purity aligns with contemporary goals of inclusive and culturally sensitive tourism (Bhatt et al., 2024<sup>8</sup>).

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<sup>129</sup> Richards, G. W. 2018. “Cultural Tourism: A Review of Recent Research and Trends.” *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 36: 12–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.03.005>.

<sup>130</sup> Sharma, A. 2023. “Integrating Cultural Values into Hospitality Education: A Case Study of Indian Institutions.”

*Journal of Tourism and Cultural Studies* 15 (2): 101–115.

### 4.3 Epic Narratives and Exemplary Hospitality

The *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* provide narrative illustrations of hospitality ethics. In the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtira's commitment to hosting during the Rajasuya Yagna exemplifies the dharmic ideal of selfless service. In the *Ramayana*, King Janaka's reception of Sage Vishwamitra and Lord Rama reflects the royal obligation to honor guests with dignity and devotion (Tiwari, 202310). These epics serve as cultural touchstones, shaping societal expectations around hosting and guest care. Their stories are often retold in educational settings, festivals, and community rituals, reinforcing hospitality as a moral and spiritual practice.

### 4.4 Relevance to Contemporary Hospitality Ethics

While classical texts are ancient, their ethical teachings remain strikingly relevant. The principles of respect, empathy, and service outlined in these works can enhance modern hospitality frameworks. For example, incorporating verses from the *Upanishads* or *Manusmriti* into hospitality training can foster a deeper understanding of cultural values and ethical conduct (Khan & Sharma, 2024). Moreover, these texts offer a counterbalance to the commodification of hospitality. In an era where service is often transactional, classical ethics remind us that hosting is a relational and moral act. This perspective can enrich guest experiences, promote cultural authenticity, and support sustainable tourism models (Richards, 2018).

### 4.5 Challenges in Integration

Despite their relevance, classical texts are rarely integrated into formal hospitality education or legal frameworks. Concerns about secularism, accessibility, and curriculum standardization often limit their inclusion. However, scholars argue that these texts can be taught as cultural heritage rather than religious doctrine, making them suitable for diverse educational contexts (Bajpai, 2020). Collaborative efforts between cultural historians, educators, and policymakers are needed to translate classical ethics into actionable guidelines. This includes developing annotated translations, case studies, and training modules that bridge ancient wisdom with modern service expectations (Kaur, 2025).

## 5. Government Campaigns and Cultural Messaging

India's tourism strategy has increasingly relied on cultural messaging to differentiate itself in the global market. Government campaigns such as *Incredible India*, *Atithi Devo Bhava*, *Dekho Apna Desh*, and *Swadesh Darshan* have sought to position India not just as a destination, but as an experience rooted in tradition, spirituality, and hospitality. These initiatives reflect an effort to institutionalize the values of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly the principle of *Atithi Devo Bhava*, within tourism governance and service delivery.

### 5.1 Incredible India and the Rise of Cultural Branding

Launched in 2002, the *Incredible India* campaign marked a turning point in India's tourism promotion. It emphasized India's diversity, heritage, and spiritual depth, moving beyond conventional marketing to embrace cultural storytelling (Ministry of Tourism, 2023<sup>131</sup>)<sup>132</sup>. The campaign's success led to its evolution into a multi-platform strategy that includes digital outreach, international roadshows, and thematic promotions.

In 2005, the *Atithi Devo Bhava* sub-campaign was introduced to sensitize service providers—drivers, guides, hotel staff toward ethical guest treatment. Training modules focused on cleanliness, courtesy, and cultural awareness, aligning with the traditional ethos of hospitality (Bhatt et al., 2024).

### 5.2 Dekho Apna Desh and Domestic Cultural Tourism

The *Dekho Apna Desh* initiative, launched in 2020, encourages Indians to explore lesser-known domestic destinations. It promotes regional cultures, cuisines, and crafts, reinforcing the idea that tourism is a vehicle for cultural preservation and community development (Ministry of Tourism, 2021<sup>133</sup>). The campaign includes webinars, contests, and curated travel itineraries that highlight India's intangible heritage. This initiative resonates with the *Atithi Devo Bhava* philosophy by encouraging respectful engagement with local communities. It also supports sustainable tourism by reducing dependence on international travel and distributing tourist traffic across diverse regions (OECD, 2024).

### 5.3 Swadesh Darshan and Spiritual Circuits

The *Swadesh Darshan* scheme focuses on developing thematic tourism circuits, Buddhist, Ramayana, Tribal, Coastal, and Spiritual. These circuits are designed to showcase India's religious and philosophical traditions, offering immersive experiences that align with IKS values (Ministry of Tourism, 2022<sup>134</sup>).

For example, the Buddhist Circuit connects sites associated with the life of Buddha, integrating infrastructure development with cultural interpretation. Such efforts promote ethical tourism and spiritual engagement, reflecting the deeper dimensions of Indian hospitality (Kaur, 2025).

### 5.4 Challenges in Cultural Messaging

Despite their ambition, these campaigns face challenges in implementation. Critics argue that cultural messaging often remains superficial, focusing on aesthetics

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<sup>131</sup> Ministry of Tourism. 2023a. HRACC Guidelines for Hotel Classification. Government of India.

<sup>132</sup> Ministry of Tourism. 2023b. National Medical & Wellness Tourism Board: Strategic Roadmap. Government of India.

<sup>133</sup> Ministry of Tourism. 2021. Dekho Apna Desh Campaign Overview. Government of India.

<sup>134</sup> Ministry of Tourism. 2022. Swadesh Darshan Scheme: Guidelines and Circuits. Government of India.

rather than ethics. Training programs may lack depth, and service providers may not fully internalize the values being promoted (Ashokan, 2025).

Moreover, the integration of IKS into policy is uneven. While some states actively promote cultural tourism, others rely on generic service models. There is a need for standardized guidelines that embed traditional values into tourism law, education, and certification (Sharma, 2023).

### **5.5 Toward Ethical and Inclusive Tourism Governance**

To strengthen cultural messaging, government campaigns must move beyond branding to embrace ethical governance. This includes:

- Developing IKS-based service standards and codes of conduct.
- Collaborating with local communities to co-create tourism experiences.
- Including classical hospitality ethics in training curricula.
- Promoting inclusive narratives that reflect India's pluralistic heritage.

Such measures can transform tourism from a commercial enterprise into a cultural exchange rooted in respect, empathy, and sustainability (Paul & Paul, 2025<sup>7</sup>).

## **6. Wellness Tourism and Indigenous Practices**

Wellness tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global travel industry, driven by a rising demand for holistic health, spiritual rejuvenation, and culturally immersive experiences. In India, wellness tourism is not a recent innovation but a continuation of ancient traditions embedded in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Practices such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Siddha, and Naturopathy have long been part of India's cultural fabric, offering therapeutic and spiritual benefits that align with the ethos of *Atithi Devo Bhava*.

### **6.1 Defining Wellness Tourism in the Indian Context**

The Global Wellness Institute (2024)<sup>135</sup> defines wellness tourism as travel associated with maintaining or enhancing one's personal well-being. In India, this concept is deeply intertwined with Indigenous practices that emphasize balance between body, mind, and spirit. Unlike Western wellness models that often focus on luxury and aesthetics, Indian wellness traditions prioritize healing, self-awareness, and ethical living (McGroarty, 2024<sup>136</sup>).

Ayurveda, for instance, is a 5,000-year-old system of medicine that uses herbs, diet, and lifestyle adjustments to restore health. Yoga, with its emphasis on breath control, meditation, and physical postures, offers both physical and spiritual

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<sup>135</sup> Global Wellness Institute. 2024. "A Decade of Wellness Tourism: Market Data and Projections." <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/global-wellness-institute-blog/2024/03/25/a-decade-of-wellness-tourism-first-ever-compilation-of-10-years-of-market-data/>.

<sup>136</sup> McGroarty, B. 2024. "A Decade of Wellness Tourism: First-Ever Compilation of 10+ Years of Market Data."

Global Wellness Institute Blog.

benefits. These practices are not just therapeutic they are philosophical systems that guide daily life and interpersonal relationships (Tiwari, 202310).]

## 6.2 Indigenous Wellness as Cultural Intervention

Recent research highlights the role of Indigenous wellness practices as cultural interventions. The Native Wellness Assessment (NWA), developed by Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al. (2017<sup>137</sup>), demonstrates how culture-centered wellness models can be effective in community health and tourism. Although the NWA was developed in a North American context, its principles resonate with Indian traditions that view wellness as a communal and spiritual pursuit.

In India, wellness retreats often incorporate storytelling, rituals, and local healing traditions, creating immersive experiences that connect tourists with Indigenous knowledge. These interventions foster cultural pride, community engagement, and sustainable tourism development (Carra et al., 2016<sup>138</sup>).

## 6.3 Government Support and Institutionalization

The Indian government has recognized the potential of wellness tourism and launched initiatives to promote it. The Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) plays a central role in standardizing practices and certifying wellness centers. The *National Medical & Wellness Tourism Board* was established to coordinate efforts across ministries and promote India as a global wellness destination (Ministry of Tourism, 20231516).

Schemes such as *Heal in India* and *Ayush Visa* aim to attract international tourists seeking traditional therapies. These programs integrate Indigenous practices into formal tourism infrastructure, enhancing credibility and accessibility (Kumari et al., 20222).

## 6.4 Wellness Tourism and Sustainable Development

Wellness tourism rooted in Indigenous practices supports sustainable development by promoting local economies, preserving cultural heritage, and reducing environmental impact. Community-based wellness centers often use locally sourced materials, traditional architecture, and organic food, aligning with eco-tourism principles (Paul & Paul, 20257).

Moreover, these experiences foster deeper connections between tourists and host communities. Visitors are not passive consumers but active participants in rituals, healing sessions, and cultural exchanges. This relational model reflects the *Atithi*

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<sup>137</sup> Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, C., Rowan, M., Dell, C., Mushquash, C., Hopkins, C., Fornssler, B., Hall, L., Mykota, D., Farag, M., and Shea, B. 2017. "Honoring Indigenous Culture-as-Intervention: Development and Validity of the Native Wellness Assessment™." *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* 16 (2): 181–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2015.1119774>.

<sup>138</sup> Carra, A., Ruhanen, L., and Whitford, M. 2016. "Indigenous Peoples and Tourism: The Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Tourism." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 24 (8–9): 1067–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2016.1206112>.

*Devo Bhava* philosophy, where guests are treated with reverence and integrated into the social fabric (Bhatt et al., 2024<sup>8</sup>).

### **6.5 Challenges and Ethical Considerations**

Despite its growth, wellness tourism faces challenges related to commodification, authenticity, and regulation. Some wellness centers prioritize profit over ethics, diluting traditional practices to cater to market demands. There is also a risk of cultural appropriation when Indigenous knowledge is used without proper attribution or community involvement (Carra et al., 2016<sup>22</sup>).

To address these concerns, scholars advocate for ethical frameworks that respect Indigenous intellectual property, involve local practitioners, and maintain the integrity of traditional systems. Certification programs, community partnerships, and cultural sensitivity training are essential to ensure that wellness tourism remains respectful and sustainable (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al., 2017<sup>21</sup>).

## **7. Gaps in Hospitality Laws and Education**

India's hospitality and tourism sectors are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, yet the legal and educational frameworks governing them often lack alignment with indigenous values. While initiatives like *Atithi Devo Bhava* and the National Education Policy (202011) signal a shift toward cultural integration, the implementation remains fragmented. This chapter explores the structural, curricular, and regulatory gaps that hinder the full incorporation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into hospitality governance and pedagogy.

### **7.1 Legal Frameworks: Prioritizing Infrastructure Over Ethics**

India's hospitality laws primarily emphasize operational standards, safety, hygiene, taxation, and licensing without explicit reference to cultural ethics or traditional hospitality norms. The *Hotel and Restaurant Approval and Classification Committee (HRACC)* guidelines focus on infrastructure and service quality but lack provisions for cultural sensitivity or ethical guest treatment (Ministry of Tourism, 202315).

Legal codes governing tourism often adopt international benchmarks such as ISO standards, which prioritize uniformity over cultural specificity. This creates a disconnect between India's philosophical hospitality ethos and its regulatory mechanisms (Sharma & Singh, 2022<sup>139</sup>). Scholars argue that legal frameworks should include ethical codes derived from classical texts and community practices to promote culturally rooted service delivery (Kaur, 20254).

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<sup>139</sup> Sharma, R., and Singh, V. 2022. "Hospitality Law and Cultural Ethics: A Comparative Study of Indian and Global Frameworks." *International Journal of Tourism Policy* 18 (1): 45–60.

## 7.2 Curriculum Design: Western Dominance in Hospitality Education

Hospitality education in India is largely modeled on Western curricula, focusing on technical skills, managerial competencies, and global service standards. While these elements are essential, they often overshadow indigenous knowledge, storytelling traditions, and ethical teachings (Bajpai, 202012).

Singh and Gupta (2021<sup>140</sup>) found that less than 10% of hospitality programs in India include modules on Indian cultural values, traditional wellness practices, or regional etiquette. This limits students' ability to engage meaningfully with India's diverse tourism landscape and undermines the country's unique value proposition in global hospitality.

## 7.3 Faculty Training and Resource Gaps

Another barrier to IKS integration is the lack of trained faculty and academic resources. Many educators are unfamiliar with classical texts, Sanskrit terminology, or regional hospitality customs. This results in superficial coverage of cultural topics or complete omission from the syllabus (Khan & Sharma, 20249).

Institutions also face challenges in accessing digitized manuscripts, annotated translations, and interdisciplinary research that could support IKS-based teaching. Without institutional support and scholarly infrastructure, faculty struggle to incorporate traditional knowledge into modern hospitality education (Bajpai, 202012).

## 7.4 Policy Disconnect and Fragmentation

While the National Education Policy (202011) advocates for the inclusion of IKS, there is limited coordination between educational bodies, tourism ministries, and cultural institutions. Policies often operate in silos, leading to fragmented implementation and missed opportunities for collaboration (Ministry of Education, 202011).

For example, the Ministry of AYUSH promotes wellness tourism, but its initiatives are rarely integrated into hospitality curricula. Similarly, cultural campaigns like *Dekho Apna Desh* are not systematically linked to academic training or certification programs (OECD, 20243). Bridging these gaps requires cross-sectoral partnerships and unified frameworks that embed IKS into both policy and pedagogy.

## 7.5 Student Perspectives and Industry Expectations

Students entering the hospitality sector often express interest in cultural tourism and ethical service but lack exposure to indigenous frameworks. A survey by Sharma (202314) revealed that 68% of hospitality students felt unprepared to

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<sup>140</sup> Singh, P., and Gupta, N. 2021. "Hospitality Education in India: Bridging the Gap Between Tradition and Modernity." *Asian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 13 (3): 88–102.

engage with spiritual tourism or traditional wellness practices, despite recognizing their importance. Industry stakeholders also report a mismatch between graduate competencies and market expectations. Tourists increasingly seek authentic, culturally immersive experiences, but service providers trained in generic models struggle to meet these demands (Richards, 2018<sup>1</sup>; Singh & Gupta, 2021<sup>24</sup>).

## **8. Embedding Indian Ethos into Policy and Training**

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into hospitality and tourism governance is not merely a cultural aspiration it is a strategic imperative for creating authentic, ethical, and globally competitive service models. While previous chapters have highlighted the philosophical and historical foundations of *Atithi Devo Bhava*, this chapter focuses on practical mechanisms for embedding Indian ethos into policy frameworks, curriculum design, and professional training.

### **8.1 Policy Recommendations Rooted in Indian Ethos**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a foundational blueprint for embedding the Indian ethos into education and governance. It emphasizes the need for an education system “deeply rooted in Indian culture and knowledge systems” and calls for curricular reforms that promote ethical reasoning, cultural pride, and holistic development (Venkata et al., 2025<sup>141</sup>).

**To translate this vision into hospitality governance, policymakers must:**

- Develop service codes inspired by classical hospitality ethics.
- Include cultural sensitivity and ethical conduct in tourism licensing and certification.
- Promote community-based tourism models that reflect regional traditions and values.
- Encourage collaboration between ministries (Tourism, AYUSH, Education) to align wellness, heritage, and hospitality goals.

Such measures can institutionalize *Atithi Devo Bhava* beyond branding, embedding it into the legal and operational fabric of tourism governance (Shamsu, 2021).

### **8.2 Curriculum Reform and Pedagogical Innovation**

Hospitality education must evolve to reflect India’s cultural richness. This includes:

- Introducing modules on Indian hospitality philosophy, classical texts, and regional customs.

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<sup>141</sup> Venkata, R. R., Bhattacharya, P., Lakhtakia, A., and Krishnasamy, S. T. 2025.

“Recommendations of India’s National Education Policy 2020 for Higher Education.” Proceedings of the Indian National Science Academy 91: 356–366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43538-025-00386-2>.

- Incorporating experiential learning through field visits to heritage sites, spiritual centers, and community-run homestays.
- Using storytelling, role-play, and case studies to teach ethical guest relations and cultural etiquette.
- Encouraging interdisciplinary research that connects IKS with tourism, law, and management.

Educational boards such as NCERT, ICSE, and NIOS have begun developing IKS-based content, but higher education institutions must follow suit with specialized programs and faculty development initiatives.

### **8.3 Teacher Training and Capacity Building**

Effective integration of Indian ethos requires trained educators who can interpret and teach IKS meaningfully. This involves:

- Organizing workshops and certification programs for faculty on IKS pedagogy.
- Collaborating with traditional scholars, Sanskrit experts, and cultural practitioners.
- Creating digital repositories of translated texts, teaching aids, and multimedia content.
- Establishing centers of excellence for Indian hospitality studies within universities.

Such efforts can empower educators to move beyond superficial cultural references and engage students in deeper ethical and philosophical inquiry (Kaur, 20254).

### **8.4 Institutional Collaboration and Governance Models**

Embedding Indian ethos into hospitality governance demands cross-sectoral collaboration. Institutions must work together to create unified frameworks that reflect cultural values. This includes:

- Joint initiatives between tourism boards, academic institutions, and cultural organizations.
- Public-private partnerships to develop culturally immersive tourism products.
- Inclusion of IKS experts in policy advisory committees and curriculum design panels.
- Development of accreditation systems that reward culturally sensitive service delivery.

These governance models can ensure consistency, accountability, and innovation in implementing the Indian ethos across sectors (Venkata et al., 202525).

## 8.5 Technology and Digital Integration

Digital platforms offer powerful tools for disseminating the Indian ethos. Online courses, virtual heritage tours, and AI-powered training modules can make IKS accessible to a wider audience. Institutions can:

- Launch MOOCs on Indian hospitality philosophy and wellness traditions.
- Use augmented reality to simulate traditional guest-host interactions.
- Develop mobile apps for cultural etiquette and regional hospitality norms.
- Create digital badges and micro-credentials for IKS-based competencies.

These innovations can democratize access to Indian ethos and enhance its relevance in a tech-driven tourism landscape (Karanwal & Singh, 2023<sup>142</sup>).

## 9. Toward an Authentic and Sustainable Tourism Experience

### 9.1 Introduction

As global tourism shifts toward more meaningful and responsible travel, India stands at a unique crossroads. The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the ethos of *Atithi Devo Bhava* offers a transformative framework for developing tourism that is both authentic and sustainable. This chapter explores how cultural immersion, ecological wisdom, and community engagement can redefine India's tourism landscape.

### 9.2 Understanding Authentic and Sustainable Tourism

Authentic tourism emphasizes genuine cultural experiences, while sustainable tourism focuses on environmental responsibility and socio-economic equity. When combined, they foster tourism that is enriching for visitors and empowering for host communities (Moore et al., 2021<sup>143</sup>).

India's traditional hospitality practices welcoming guests with reverence, sharing customs, and offering spiritual engagement naturally align with these principles. Drawing from IKS, tourism can evolve beyond commodification to become a vehicle for cultural preservation and ethical engagement (Zhang et al., 2019<sup>144</sup>).

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<sup>142</sup> Karanwal, B., and Singh, B. 2023. "Embedding Indian Knowledge Traditions in School Education." *Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL)* 10 (3): 63–68. <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2023.10308>.

<sup>143</sup> Moore, K., Buchmann, A., Månsson, M., and Fisher, D. 2021. "Authenticity in Tourism Theory and Experience: Practically Indispensable and Theoretically Mischievous?" *Annals of Tourism Research* 89: 103208. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103208>.

<sup>144</sup> Zhang, T., Chen, J., and Hu, B. 2019. "Authenticity, Quality, and Loyalty: Local Food and Sustainable Tourism Experience." *Sustainability* 11 (12): 3437. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11123437>.

### 9.3 Cultural Immersion and Community-Based Tourism

Travelers increasingly seek immersive experiences that connect them with local traditions. Initiatives such as heritage walks, folk art workshops, and spiritual retreats allow tourists to engage deeply with India's cultural fabric (Sims, 2009<sup>145</sup>). Community-based tourism empowers locals to become custodians of their heritage. The *Atithi Devo Bhava* philosophy encourages hosts to treat guests as part of the community, fostering mutual respect and meaningful exchange. This model also ensures that economic benefits are distributed equitably, supporting rural livelihoods and cultural continuity (Zhang et al., 2019).

### 9.4 Culinary Heritage and Authenticity

Local cuisine is a powerful medium for cultural storytelling. Studies show that food authenticity enhances tourist satisfaction and loyalty, as it reflects the identity of a destination (Zhang et al., 2019). In India, traditional cooking methods, regional ingredients, and culinary rituals offer rich opportunities for engagement. Promoting local food systems supports sustainability by reducing carbon footprints and preserving culinary heritage. Integrating food tourism into broader cultural narratives deepens tourists' understanding of Indian values and traditions (Sims, 2009).

### 9.5 Ecological Wisdom and Environmental Sustainability

IKS includes ecological principles that promote harmony with nature—such as sacred groves, seasonal festivals, and water conservation rituals. These traditions can inform sustainable tourism strategies, including eco-tourism and green hospitality infrastructure (Paul & Paul, 2025).

Embedding indigenous ecological wisdom into tourism planning allows India to address climate challenges while offering travelers a deeper connection to nature. This approach aligns with global sustainability goals and enhances India's reputation as a responsible tourism destination (Moore et al., 2021).

### 9.6 Challenges and Strategic Pathways

Despite its potential, authentic and sustainable tourism faces challenges such as over-commercialization, cultural dilution, and lack of regulatory frameworks. To overcome these barriers, India must:

- Develop certification systems for authentic and sustainable tourism.
- Train service providers in cultural sensitivity and ethical hospitality.
- Promote regional tourism circuits that highlight local traditions and ecological practices.

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<sup>145</sup> Sims, R. 2009. "Food, Place and Authenticity: Local Food and the Sustainable Tourism Experience." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 17 (3): 321–336.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580802359293>.

- Encourage academic research and policy dialogue on IKS-based tourism models.

Strategic partnerships between government, academia, and civil society can facilitate these reforms and ensure tourism development aligns with India's cultural and environmental values.

## 10. Conclusion and Future Directions

### 10.1 Summary of Insights

This research has explored the transformative potential of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in shaping authentic and sustainable tourism experiences. By integrating the ethos of *Atithi Devo Bhava*, India's hospitality sector can move beyond transactional models to embrace cultural depth, ethical engagement, and ecological responsibility.

#### Key insights include:

- **Authenticity as a cornerstone** of meaningful tourism, rooted in cultural immersion, culinary heritage, and spiritual engagement.
- **Sustainability through indigenous wisdom**, including ecological practices and community-based tourism models.
- **Challenges and opportunities** in implementing IKS-driven tourism, such as policy gaps, commercialization risks, and the need for capacity building.

### 10.2 Contributions to Hospitality and Tourism Studies

This study contributes to the growing discourse on decolonizing tourism by foregrounding indigenous philosophies and practices. It offers a framework for hospitality education that is

culturally grounded and globally relevant. The integration of IKS into tourism policy and pedagogy can foster a more inclusive and ethical tourism landscape.

Moreover, the research highlights the role of academic institutions in promoting IKS through curriculum design, faculty training, and community outreach. Hospitality educators and practitioners are encouraged to adopt culturally sensitive approaches that honor India's rich heritage while meeting contemporary demands.

### 10.3 Policy and Practice Recommendations

To operationalize the findings, the following strategic actions are recommended:

- **Develop IKS-based tourism certification systems** to ensure authenticity and sustainability.
- **Incorporate IKS into hospitality curricula**, emphasizing cultural sensitivity, ethical hosting, and ecological stewardship.
- **Foster partnerships** between government, academia, and local communities to co- create tourism experiences.
- **Support research and innovation** in IKS-driven tourism models, including digital storytelling, heritage mapping, and eco-tourism design.

## 10.4 Future Research Directions

While this study lays a foundational framework, further research is needed to:

- Examine the **economic impact** of IKS-based tourism on rural livelihoods.
- Explore **visitor perceptions** of authenticity and cultural engagement in Indian destinations.
- Assess the **effectiveness of policy interventions** in promoting sustainable tourism.
- Investigate the **role of technology** in preserving and promoting IKS, such as virtual heritage tours and AI-powered cultural guides.

## 10.5 Final Reflections

India's tourism potential lies not only in its monuments and landscapes but in its living traditions, philosophies, and values. By embracing *Atithi Devo Bhava* and the wisdom of IKS,

the country can offer tourism experiences that are not only memorable but transformative. This vision calls for a collective commitment from policymakers, educators, practitioners, and travelers to honor the spirit of hospitality and sustainability.

### Brief Profile of Author

**Mr. Hitesh Kadiyan** is an accomplished hospitality professional and educator, currently serving as Assistant Professor at the School of Hotel Management, Starex University, Gurugram. With a Master's and Bachelor's degree in Hotel Management and a Ph.D. in progress, he brings over four years of industry experience. His academic journey includes curriculum design for B.Voc., Diploma, and NEP-aligned UG programs, along with active roles in Board of Studies and academic coordination. Mr. Kadiyan has published research papers, book chapters, and a patent on AI-driven hospitality systems. He has organized and attended numerous seminars, FDPs, and workshops, and is a certified assessor and CBSE course committee member. Known for his leadership in student engagement, event planning, and technical documentation, he continues to shape hospitality education with innovation, inclusivity, and a commitment to excellence.

**Mob:** +91-9306291076

**E-mail:** hm2@starexuniversity.co.in

### **Brief Profile of Co-Author**

**Dr. Rajni Kaushal** is a dedicated legal academic and practitioner, currently serving as Assistant Professor at Starex University, Gurugram. With a Ph.D. in Law from K.R. Mangalam University, her research focuses on victim compensation and legislative trends. She holds an LL.M in Criminal Law and a B.A. LL.B (Hons.) from Guru Nanak Dev University. Dr. Kaushal brings rich courtroom experience from her tenure at the Punjab & Haryana High Court, specializing in matrimonial disputes. At Starex University, she enhances student advocacy through moot courts, curriculum development, and legal research mentorship. Her scholarly contributions include multiple publications on cyber victimology and active participation in national and international seminars. Passionate about justice, human rights, and legal reform, she plays a pivotal role in launching postgraduate law programs and fostering academic excellence. Her commitment to legal education and community engagement continues to shape future legal professionals.

**Mob:** +91-9599031977

**E-mail:** [advocaterajni@gmail.com](mailto:advocaterajni@gmail.com)

# Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and the Discourse on Human Rights: A Civilizational Perspective

Anuja Sharma

Ajinkya Waghmare

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## 1. Introduction

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the rich body of indigenous knowledge developed in India over thousands of years. Passed down through oral traditions, texts, and cultural practices, IKS includes fields like Dharmaśāstra (ethics and law), Nyāya (logic), Mimāṃsā (interpretation of texts), Ayurveda (medicine), Arthashāstra (governance), Nāṭyaśāstra (arts and aesthetics), and Yoga. Far from being outdated, IKS is a dynamic and evolving system that has shaped Indian ways of thinking, living, and governing. At its heart is the concept of dharma, which means duty, justice, and the right way of living. Dharma provides a moral foundation that supports values like human dignity, fairness, social responsibility, and collective well-being, all of which are key elements of modern human rights. The discourse on human rights in contemporary legal and academic settings is largely framed through the lens of Western liberal philosophy, particularly post-Enlightenment and post-World War II developments. It is often assumed that the concepts of individual dignity, freedom, equality, and justice emerged primarily in Euro-American intellectual traditions. However, this framing overlooks the rich civilizational traditions embedded within non-Western societies such as India. This chapter aims to interrogate and reframe the understanding of human rights by engaging with the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which, while distinct in epistemology and expression, resonate deeply with many foundational principles of the global human rights regime.

The modern conception of human rights, codified in instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), emphasizes civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and collective rights. These include the right to life, liberty, education, equality before the law, freedom of expression, access to health and work, and protection of minorities and the environment. While these are articulated through a rights-based language, IKS tends to approach similar issues through a duty-based ontology, in which the well-being of the individual and the collective is achieved by fulfilling one's ethical and social duties. This distinction, rather than creating a dichotomy, enables a complementary synthesis. Where Western models assert rights to protect liberty, IKS emphasises obligations to uphold social harmony, suggesting that a balance of both is necessary for sustainable justice.

One of the most profound intersections between IKS and human rights lies in the concept of inherent human dignity. The Upanishadic declaration of *Tat Tvam Asi* (“Thou art that”) proclaims a metaphysical unity among all beings, implying that every individual contains the universal divine principle. This ontological equality suggests that no human being is inferior or excluded from the circle of moral and spiritual consideration. The Bhagavad Gītā’s ideal of *samatva* (equanimity or equal vision) further endorses this ethical universality. Such philosophical underpinnings align with the idea of dignity as the moral foundation of all human rights. Indian traditions also provide early and robust articulations of social justice and inclusion. The teachings of the Buddha and Mahāvīra rejected caste hierarchies, ritual purity, and violence, advocating instead for compassion, equality, and non-attachment. These ideas laid the foundation for moral universalism and social ethics in the subcontinent. Medieval reformist movements, particularly the Bhakti and Sufi traditions, deepened this ethos by emphasising human equality before the divine and challenging socio-religious exclusions based on gender and caste. These movements were not merely devotional but also socio-political, aimed at restoring dignity to the marginalized, thus advancing what today would be understood as the human rights of oppressed groups.

While modern rights discourse is often individualistic, IKS is fundamentally communitarian, placing greater emphasis on the duties of individuals toward society. This is evident in the Dharmashastra texts, the Arthashastra, and the Mahābhārata, which conceptualise governance and justice through the lens of moral responsibility. A ruler (*raja*) is bound by *rajadharma*, the obligation to ensure justice, welfare, and protection for all subjects. Similarly, individuals are expected to act ethically not merely for self-interest but for *lokasamgraha*, the welfare of the world. This framework, although it differs from modern legalism, proposes a rights-supportive ecosystem where justice arises through collective ethical conduct.

Education, a cornerstone of both IKS and human rights, was seen as a sacred obligation in ancient Indian society. The Gurukula system, in its ideal form, promoted knowledge as a right and responsibility rather than a privilege. Even Buddhist monastic universities like Nalanda and Vikramshila advanced egalitarian learning traditions. This resonates with the contemporary right to education as not only a social entitlement but also a tool of empowerment and emancipation.

IKS also offers sophisticated insights into the right to health and environmental sustainability. The Ayurvedic approach to medicine treats health (*svasthya*) as a balance between bodily, mental, social, and environmental factors. It promotes a preventive, holistic model of well-being, which aligns with the World Health Organization’s definition of health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Additionally, the ancient concept of (*Rta* cosmic and ecological order) highlights a deep ecological consciousness, long before environmental rights

became a part of the human rights discourse. This worldview suggests a seamless integration between individual well-being, societal harmony, and ecological integrity. However, this chapter also acknowledges the challenges and limitations of IKS in its historical applications. While IKS contains liberative and egalitarian ideals, many of its historical manifestations were marked by caste hierarchies, gender discrimination, and social exclusion. Practices such as untouchability, rigid varna-based divisions, and suppression of women's rights were not only prevalent but also sometimes legitimized through certain interpretations of dharmic texts. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that the reformist impulses within Indian civilization, from the teachings of the Buddha to modern figures like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr B.R. Ambedkar, arose from within the tradition itself. These reformers reinterpreted IKS to assert universal human dignity and social justice, showing that Indian tradition is dynamic, not static.

The Indian Constitution, as a modern legal document, reflects a synthesis of IKS and human rights values. The Fundamental Rights echo the liberal democratic rights framework, while the Fundamental Duties in Article 51A draw directly from the duty-based ethical tradition of India. Articles related to the environment (Art. 48A), education (Art. 21A), and social justice (Art. 15 and 17) reflect this confluence. Recent policy efforts, such as the National Education Policy (2020), call for the integration of IKS into contemporary curricula, acknowledging its relevance in promoting ethical, inclusive, and sustainable development.

In conclusion, Indian Knowledge Systems offer an alternative yet compatible vision to the global human rights discourse. By integrating a duty-based, holistic, and community-rooted ethics, IKS can enrich human rights frameworks that often focus narrowly on individual entitlements. A meaningful engagement between IKS and modern rights discourse can lead to a more grounded, context-sensitive, and ethically robust approach to justice and dignity. Rather than treating IKS as archaic or peripheral, its integration into the discourse on rights allows for a civilizational synergy that honours both universal values and indigenous wisdom. This chapter argues that reclaiming IKS in the human rights domain is not an exercise in cultural nostalgia, but a necessary step toward creating a more inclusive, plural, and morally anchored vision of humanity

## **2. Human Rights and the Western Liberal Framework**

Western philosophy, particularly that of the years following World War II and the Enlightenment, is largely responsible for the contemporary concept of human rights. These concepts center on the individual, defending their equality, freedom, and dignity. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the most significant international text on human rights, discusses a wide range of rights. These include the rights to freedom of expression, equality, work, education, health, and life. Protecting people from injustice and enabling everyone to live freely and with

respect are the primary objectives of these rights. Nonetheless, this contemporary framework for rights sometimes assumes that the concepts of equality, justice, and dignity originated primarily in Europe and America. It tends to neglect that other civilizations, like India, also have strong traditions of ethics, justice, and compassion long before the contemporary Western world explored these principles. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) provide an alternative viewpoint that is complementary. IKS stresses duties and responsibilities as the way to justice and harmony rather than just individual rights. This indicates that Indian philosophy holds that achieving the well-being of all people involves more than merely requesting rights; it also entails carrying out one's obligations to society and other people. Therefore, this article aims to connect these two ways of thinking — the Western rights-based approach and the Indian duty-based approach — to create a more complete understanding of human rights that values both freedom and responsibility.

### **3. IKS and the Ontology of Duties**

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and contemporary rights-based frameworks differ primarily in how they view social order and human obligations. IKS stresses a duty-based approach, emphasizing the moral and social responsibilities that uphold both individual and societal well-being, in contrast to modern human rights, which mostly concentrate on individual entitlements. This distinction is complementary rather than contradictory. In IKS, carrying out one's responsibilities inevitably defends the rights of others, establishing a moral and social ecosystem that self-regulates. Ideas like *lokasamgraha*, working for the well-being of society—and *dharma*—moral obligation, and righteous behaviour, showcase how individual deeds and societal equilibrium are intertwined. People who behave morally promote societal harmony, justice, and the well-being of society as a whole.

In contrast to the Western legal model, which frequently uses formal institutions to uphold rights, IKS contends that moral responsibility and ethical action are the sources of justice. According to this concept, the responsibilities of people, citizens, educators, and rulers are all focused on preserving social balance. IKS offers a comprehensive worldview in which societal harmony and individual freedom are mutually reinforcing by placing equal emphasis on duties and rights. By using this duty-centred perspective, the IKS method offers a picture of justice based on moral responsibility, ethical interconnectedness, and the common good, enriching rather than merely complementing the contemporary rights-based paradigm.

### **4. Human Dignity and Ethical Universalism in IKS**

The idea of inherent human dignity represents a significant point of intersection between contemporary human rights and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

According to Indian philosophical traditions, everyone has inherent value that should be respected and taken into account. This worldview is best illustrated by the Upaniṣadic aphorism *Tat Tvam Asi*, which states that all entities are fundamentally metaphysically one. This principle suggests that no one is intrinsically inferior or exempt from ethical considerations because every human embodies the universal divine essence. Similar to this, the *Bhagavad Gītā* presents the concept of *samatva*, or equanimity, which promotes viewing all life with fairness and dignity. *Samatva* emphasizes the moral obligation to treat everyone equally, fairly, and compassionately, regardless of social or cultural differences. These lessons demonstrate how societal harmony and moral behavior are predicated on spiritual and moral equality. The contemporary view of human dignity as the moral basis of human rights is strongly aligned with such philosophical concepts. IKS treats the concept of dignity from a spiritual and ethical standpoint, stressing the moral duties that result from acknowledging the shared humanity of all people, whereas modern human rights discourse frequently frames it in legal and political terms.

IKS provides a civilizational viewpoint on universal human dignity by including these duty-oriented and morally based ideas, so reaffirming the notion that moral consciousness and ethical responsibility are closely linked to justice and rights.

## **5. Traditions of Social Justice and Inclusion**

In Indian culture, the concepts of social justice and inclusivity are deeply ingrained. In opposition to strict societal structures, ancient Indian intellectuals and religious leaders placed a strong emphasis on equality, compassion, and non-violence. *Mahāvīra* and the Buddha were two of the most important individuals in this respect. Buddha disagreed with the notion that a person's birth might define their social standing or spiritual value. He advocated for equality for all people and disapproved of the strict caste system. Buddha's teachings promoted a society where everyone is treated equally, regardless of social background, and placed a strong emphasis on compassion and moral behaviour.

The 24th Tirthankara of Jainism, *Mahāvīra*, also emphasized the values of honesty, moral behavior, and *ahimsā* (non-violence). He stressed that all living things deserve respect and moral concern and condemned societal prejudice. A moral basis for social ethics and universal duty was established by these early teachings. They pushed individuals to care for others, not just in their immediate communities but in society as a whole, stressing the idea that justice is a social obligation. The *Bhakti* and *Sufi* groups during the Middle Ages further reinforced the ideas of equality and inclusion.

The *Bhakti* movement, which spread throughout India, rejected caste barriers, ceremonial hierarchies, and social exclusivity in favour of a direct and intimate relationship with the divine. The notion that all people are equal before God was

propagated by saints like Kabir, Mirabai, and Tulsidas. Additionally, Sufi saints promoted egalitarian principles by highlighting compassion, love, and the equality of all individuals. They prioritized spiritual and moral equality before social or financial standing. Both the Bhakti and Sufi movements revolutionized social and political life in addition to religious and spiritual practices. They laid the foundation for contemporary concepts of social justice and human rights by promoting ethical responsibility, inclusivity, and respect for the underprivileged. These historical movements demonstrate how social fairness has long been cultivated in Indian civilization. It encompassed moral conduct, empathy, and the obligation to uplift others in addition to legal rights and advantages. IKS is therefore a useful tool for conceptualizing human rights in a comprehensive, responsibility-conscious way.

## **6. Governance, Duties, and Justice**

IKS governance differs greatly from contemporary ideas, which frequently concentrate only on political power or legality. The Dharmaśāstra, Arthaśāstra, and Mahābhārata are among the ancient Indian writings that highlight moral responsibility as the foundation of administration.

The idea of rājadharmā emphasizes that it is the responsibility of rulers (rājās) to uphold justice, safeguard citizens, and advance wellbeing. Authority is a sacred trust rather than a goal unto itself. The welfare of the populace and the equity of society are the moral responsibility of a ruler. As a result, governance is viewed as a moral endeavour that integrates welfare, ethics, and justice. The ethical performance of obligations, not just control or enforcement, is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of authority. IKS highlights that leaders, educators, and individuals all have moral obligations to uphold social balance on an individual basis. The idea of lokasaṃgraha, or working for the good of the world, as presented in the Bhagavad Gītā, emphasizes the connection between individual morality and the welfare of society. It teaches that when people carry out their responsibilities with diligence, morality, and selflessness, social harmony and justice result.

An environment that supports rights is fostered by this framework. IKS fosters a culture where moral behaviour inherently supports justice and fairness, in contrast to adversarial legal regimes where rights are upheld by courts or compulsion. In addition to rights, duties, and obligations, foster a more cohesive and sustainable community.

## **7. Education, Health, and the Holistic Vision of Rights**

The Indian ethical vision places a strong emphasis on health and education, which link societal advancement to personal well-being. The Gurukula system placed a strong emphasis on education as a duty as well as a right. While teachers had a responsibility to guide pupils ethically and morally, students were required to learn

attentively. Large Buddhist monastic universities that encouraged cosmopolitanism and equality included Vikramaśīla and Nālandā. They emphasized intellectual and moral growth while welcoming students from a variety of backgrounds.

In addition to imparting information, education fostered civic engagement, ethical ideals, and social consciousness—all of which are intimately related to contemporary notions of the right to education as a means of social mobility and empowerment.

## **Health**

According to Āyurveda, *svasthya*, or health, is a state of equilibrium among the environment, society, mind, and body. Physical well-being is only one aspect of well-being; mental, social, and ecological aspects are also included. The World Health Organization's definition of health, which places a strong emphasis on overall physical, mental, and social well-being, is quite similar to this. The ancient idea of cosmic order, or *Rta*, links environmental ethics and human accountability. It foreshadows contemporary concepts of environmental rights and sustainable living, demonstrating the connections between moral obligation, social welfare, and ecological stewardship. IKS emphasizes the reciprocal nature of rights and obligations by incorporating health and education within a moral framework. Citizens who are empowered, educated, and in good health are better able to uphold justice, contribute to-

## **8. Challenges and Internal Reform in IKS**

It's critical to recognize the historical constraints of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), even though they offer insightful ethical perspectives. In contrast to the freeing nature of *dharma*, some interpretations of dharmic scriptures promoted behaviours like caste hierarchies, untouchability, gender exclusion, and ritual discrimination. Reform was necessary to bring these practices into line with moral and ethical principles because they led to social inequities and inequality.

However, as numerous reformist movements and intellectuals have shown, IKS has always included self-corrective mechanisms. Buddha and Mahāvīra advocated for equality, non-violence, and compassion while opposing caste-based hierarchies. *Bhakti* saints promoted inclusivity and moral responsibility by highlighting universal human worth and devotion that transcends social class. To uphold social justice, equality, and human rights in the contemporary era, reformers such as Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar reinterpreted traditional knowledge. Ambedkar fought to end caste prejudice and guarantee constitutional protections for underprivileged groups, whereas Gandhi concentrated on non-violence and moral responsibility. These illustrations demonstrate how IKS is flexible and self-reflective, able to change to meet societal demands while upholding its moral core. Because reform is ingrained in the

system, its tenets can be modified to meet modern social justice and human rights norms.

### **9. Constitutional Reflections: IKS and the Modern Indian State**

The Indian Constitution is a distinctive blend of contemporary rights-based frameworks and Indian ethical traditions. IKS's duty-based philosophy is reflected in the Fundamental Duties (Article 51A), which place equal emphasis on moral obligation and legal rights. It is expected of citizens to support justice, preserve the environment, advance social welfare, and obey the law.

In the meantime, a liberal-democratic framework that ensures equality, freedom, and protection from discrimination is provided by the Fundamental Rights (Part III), which guarantees civil, political, social, and cultural rights. The merger of duty and rights is echoed in articles about social justice (Articles 15 and 17), education (Article 21A), and the environment (Article 48A), illustrating the long-lasting impact of IKS on contemporary government.

IKS' involvement in curricula is further emphasized by recent initiatives like the National Education Policy (2020). Promoting moral citizenship, fostering inclusive and holistic education, and bringing traditional knowledge into line with contemporary developmental objectives, including social justice, sustainability, and moral responsibility, are the objectives. India exemplifies how traditional knowledge systems can support contemporary human rights by incorporating IKS ideas into legislation, education, and policy. This establishes a framework in which rights, obligations, and moral obligations cooperate for the benefit of all.

### **10. Conclusion**

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer a comprehensive and timeless framework for comprehending justice, human dignity, and moral obligation. IKS enhances the contemporary rights-based rhetoric, which frequently concentrates primarily on individual freedom and entitlements, by highlighting obligations, moral responsibility, and the welfare of society. When combined, these viewpoints provide a more comprehensive and balanced conception of human rights, one in which social peace, ethical responsibility, and individual liberties coexist.

IKS's self-corrective and reformist traditions—from the Buddha and Bhakti saints to Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar—showcase its capacity for inclusivity and moral renewal, despite the fact that it has traditionally encountered difficulties like societal hierarchies and exclusions. These reformist currents highlight how Indian philosophy is dynamic and ever-changing, demonstrating how conventional wisdom may be continuously modified to advance universal ideals.

The Indian Constitution, which combines fundamental rights with duties and incorporates ethical obligations into governance, social justice, education, and environmental stewardship, is a prime example of the successful integration of IKS

principles and contemporary human rights ideals. In summary, combining IKS with modern human rights theory provides a civilizational conversation that is both forward-looking and not just sentimental. It promotes a society that upholds individual liberties while simultaneously being mindful of group responsibilities, moral behaviour, and sustainable growth. Society may work toward a vision of justice that is fair, caring, and based on both indigenous knowledge and universal principles by fusing these two complementary frameworks.

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### **BIO of Author and Co Author**

#### **Author**

**Anuja Sharma** is a NET-qualified legal scholar with an LL.M. and a B.A. LL.B. credentials. As an Assistant Professor at DES's Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune, she has teaching experience in Constitutional Law, Administrative Law, Labour Law, Criminal Law, Alternative Dispute Resolution, and Professional Ethics. Her research portfolio is robust: she is currently spearheading a foundation-funded project on transgender rights with the Maitreyi Foundation, and holds a patent for a "Rechargeable Portable Device for Judicial Information and Analytics Kiosk." Anuja has authored and edited several books and chapters; her peer-reviewed work addresses issues such as morality, age of consent, criminal law reform, and the role of artificial intelligence in legal practice. She has designed specialised certificate courses, delivered guest lectures,

*and is recognised for her outstanding contributions with the Wegrow India Best Research Excellence Award 2024.*

### **Co Author**

**Ajinkya R. Waghmare** is a law academician with over three years of teaching experience. He holds a B.S.L., LL.B. degree from ILS Law College, Pune, and an LL.M. in Constitutional and Administrative Law from Savitribai Phule Pune University. He is NET and SET qualified. Ajinkya has taught at the Department of Law, Savitribai Phule Pune University, and Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce (BMCC), Pune, and is currently working at DES Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune. His areas of interest include Constitutional Law, the Indian Evidence Act, Transfer of Property Law, and the Indian Penal Code. He has published research on sustainable development, disability rights, and principles of natural justice, authored various book chapters, and has also worked on a funded research project on disability rights

## 21.

# Exploring IKS for Ecological Harmony: Addressing Contemporary Challenges

**Pradnya Yadav**<sup>146</sup>

*Assistant Professor,*

*DES Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune.*

**Pooja Deo**<sup>147</sup>

*Assistant Professor,*

*DES Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune.*

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### **Introduction:**

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), with their inherent comprehension of ecosystems, biodiversity, and resource management, are essential to advancing environmental sustainability. Fostering harmony between human beings and the natural world, it provides insightful information on sustainable life.

Civilisation is facing an unprecedented ecological disaster in the twenty-first century. The ongoing existence of life as we recognise it is under threat due to a combination of factors such as resource depletion, biodiversity loss, climate change, and deforestation. These issues are fundamentally civilizational in nature rather than just technological. They urge a reassessment of our interactions with and perception of nature (prakriti) as well as the way we pass on ecological values to future generations (Parampara).

The quest for ecological balance has always been fundamental to Indian knowledge systems. Indian culture has an extensive understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment, as evidenced by Vedic hymns and tribal customs. This vision, which is based on dharma (ethical obligation) and ṛta (cosmic order), expresses a worldview in which the natural world is a living continuum of awareness rather than an external resource.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a diverse, integrated paradigm that perceives ecological harmony as a dynamic interplay between Prakriti, the sustaining essence of nature, and Parampara, the living transmission of wisdom. Reorienting mankind towards compassionate and sustainable cohabitation is possible through their integration.

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<sup>146</sup> Assistant Professor, DES Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune.

<sup>147</sup> Assistant Professor, DES Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune.

## **Integrating Parampara and Prakriti:**

In the present context,...

.987 the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) provides a very significant and relevant perspective on environmental legislation. IKS promotes a deeper philosophical and ethical basis that emphasises harmony with nature, interconnection, and a feeling of responsibility, whereas contemporary environmental law frequently functions within a framework of rules, sanctions, and scientific evidence. By extending beyond mere adherence to promote true ecological responsibility, this all-encompassing strategy may support and enhance current environmental regulatory frameworks.

## **Tradition as Living Continuity:**

In Sanskrit, Parampara means literally "succession" or "an unbroken lineage." Yet, it symbolises an active continuity of actions and knowledge in its philosophical meaning. Through oral traditions, rituals, teaching, and life experiences, it represents the shared experiences and ethical consciousness that have been transmitted down through the centuries. Ecologically speaking, Parampara ensures that knowledge about the environment, such as patterns of rainfall, types of seeds, forest management, or animal behaviour, is preserved and enhanced by adaptation. It turns ecological participation into a cultural legacy that is upheld by ritual and devotion rather than just norms. The transmission of living knowledge is reflected in the agricultural calendar, the oral literature of tribal tribes, and the guru-shishya tradition. Every generation maintains continuity while enabling creative progress by interpreting the past in response to emerging ecological realities.

Indian knowledge civilization's versatility and resilience require a knowledge of tradition as living continuity. Literally translated, Parampara implies an uninterrupted lineage or succession of wisdom (guru-shishya Parampara) in Sanskrit. Its core, however, transcends the simple transmission of traditions or writings. It represents the dynamic transfer of wisdom through ethical behaviour, lived experience, and cultural innovation across time. Accordingly, tradition functions as a continuous process of adaptation, or what academics refer to as "innovative continuity." In order to ensure continuous existence, each generation adapts and changes ancestral customs to meet modern demands. This flexibility is encoded in the oral legacy of folk songs, proverbs, and myths, which permits the natural evolution of communal memory.

Acknowledging tradition as a living continuation provides an alternative to environmental exploitation and alienation in the current era of ecological crises and globalisation. It helps people rediscover their moral foundations, ecological obligations, and communal memory. Reviving a feeling of sustainability based on culture rather than force can be achieved by incorporating such continuity into policymaking, environmental initiatives, and education.

## **Nature as Essence**

One of the fundamental ideas of Indian philosophy is Prakṛiti. According to Samkhya philosophy, it symbolises the beginning of material reality from which the cosmos develops as a result of the interplay between the three guṇas: tamas (inertia), rajas (activity), and sattva (balance). Prakṛiti is a dynamic, self-organising principle that gives rise to all life forms rather than inanimate matter. In terms of ecology, prakṛti represents the cycles, seasons, and symbiotic interactions that keep life on Earth going. It communicates the concept that all living things, even non-human ones, are a part of a cosmic process that is interrelated. In keeping with what contemporary science refers to as ecological imbalance, disrupting the balance results in vikṛti (disorder). By affirming the unity of all things, the Upanishads enhance this vision: "Sarvam khalvidam Brahma" – "All this is indeed Brahman." In this context, prakṛiti is the external manifestation of the invisible spirit and is not distinct from divinity. Therefore, to damage nature is to transgress the divine order itself. Humans are co-creators, not masters, in this cosmology. They are composed of the same elements as the universe. The ethical underpinning of Indian environmental philosophy is this understanding of interconnectedness.

A fundamental component of IKS is a profound respect for nature, which is seen as a living being that is frequently personified as divine rather than just as a resource to be utilised. Numerous hymns and philosophical discussions that honour the divine presence in elements like earth (Prithvi), water (Jal), and fire (Agni) can be found in texts like the Vedas and Upanishads (space/Akash and air/Vayu (Pancha Maha Bhutas), taking them into account as essential elements of the cosmic order (Vishwa). An innate appreciation for the environment is fostered by this perspective. The prakṛiti ideology provides an alternative to the imperialist paradigm of development in the face of global ecological issues. It advocates for a relational ecology, in which people play a part in nature's rhythm rather than controlling its mechanisms.

## **Parampara–Prakṛiti Nexus: A Synthesis for Ecological Harmony:**

The deep relationship between tradition and nature that provides the basis of India's ecological philosophy is symbolised by the Parampara–Prakṛiti Resonance. Originating from Sanskrit, prakṛiti corresponds to the dynamic material and spiritual principle of nature, whereas Parampara signifies an uninterrupted lineage of knowledge transmission. Together, they create a continuity that supports one another—a dynamic conversation between ecological reality and cultural memory. Retaining ecological information amassed over ages, Parampara serves as a collective memory system. It protects the moral precepts of dharma (obligation), samatā (balance), and ahimsā (non-violence), which govern how people interact with nature. Ecological knowledge becomes disjointed, disconnected from culture, and vulnerable to abuse in the absence of Parampara. Knowledge gains moral depth, significance, and continuity with it. Prakṛiti, as used in ecology, refers to

the living Earth, its cycles, and its subtle forces. The concept acknowledges that all elements, fire, earth, water, air, and space, are holy and essential to the whole, implying interdependence and balance. This perspective on the world is celebrated in the Rig Veda, which invokes mountains, rivers, and forests as gods. All beings possess the same divine nature, according to the Upanishads. Therefore, ecological imbalance is viewed as spiritual discord, and prakṛti is not just the physical environment but the manifestation of awareness itself. Prakṛti and Parampara have a mutually strengthening connection in which tradition upholds the moral awareness necessary to coexist peacefully with nature, while nature offers the experiential foundation for tradition's rejuvenation and validity. Humans learn how to cohabit with Prakṛti through the ideals and practices that Parampara conveys. Cultural practices that include ecological awareness include agricultural festivals, water harvesting customs, sacred trees, and taboos against overexploitation. Long before concepts of sustainable behaviour were codified by contemporary environmental science, these traditions encoded them.

India's ecological consciousness is embodied in the Parampara–Prakṛti Nexus, a vision in which knowledge and ethics, culture and environment, and the past and present come together to form a single continuity of existence. Prakṛti represents the life mechanism that keeps everything alive, whereas Parampara maintains the common understanding of how to live in harmony. Their combination creates a cohabitation philosophy that strikes a balance between continuity and flexibility.

### **Challenges in the implementation of IKS:**

One of the oldest and most extensive civilizational frameworks of wisdom in the world is the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). It includes philosophy, science, art, ecology, ethics, and spirituality, and has its roots in Sanskrit, folk, tribal, and regional traditions. IKS represents a comprehensive view of life that combines material advancement with ethical and ecological responsibilities, drawing inspiration from the Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda, architecture, music, and environmental ethics. Through the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), the creation of the IKS Division under the Ministry of Education, and the introduction of IKS courses in universities, the Indian government and academic institutions have recently redoubled their efforts to mainstream IKS. Nevertheless, there are still a number of structural, epistemological, and sociological obstacles to overcome before IKS can be fully implemented.

These difficulties are caused by institutional inertia, historical marginalisation, and the intricate relationships between modernity and globalisation. Indigenous ecological knowledge was considered as superstitious by colonial educational institutions, which gave preference to Western scientific paradigms. Even today, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is frequently disregarded until "validated" by Western scientific standards, demonstrating the persistence of this epistemic

prejudice. As a result, the conversation is unbalanced, undervaluing traditional custodianship and marginalising local ecological views.

- a) **Knowledge Disintegration:** IKS is intrinsically integrative, but the current educational system, which was shaped by colonial epistemologies, divided knowledge into strict disciplines—science, humanities, and commerce. It views ecology, ethics, and philosophy as interconnected. Instead of bringing about a radical paradigm change, implementing IKS inside the compartmentalised framework of universities frequently results in symbolic inclusion (e.g., optional courses or isolated modules).
- b) **Weak Institutional Frameworks:** Although India's Ministry of Education now has an IKS Division, there isn't a specific institution that focuses just on IKS's ecological applications. IKS is seldom systematically included in environmental policies like the National Biodiversity Act or Climate Action Plans. Instead of developing the fundamental tenets of environmental governance, implementation is frequently fragmented, restricted to individual research projects or cultural displays. Adoption of long-term policies is hampered by this institutional consistency.
- c) **Lack of Multidisciplinary Research:** IKS ecosystem blooms in the nexus of hydrology, spirituality, ethics, ethnography, and botany. However, strict disciplinary boundaries and compartmentalised departments dominate India's research landscape. It is uncommon to find collaborative research that integrates traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary environmental science, and when it does, it is rarely supported or acknowledged by academia.
- d) **Problems with Language and Accessibility:** Vernacular oral traditions, Sanskrit, and Tamil maintain a large portion of India's ecological knowledge. Researchers and policymakers face obstacles due to the absence of translations, field documentation, and digital archives. Instead of impacting general ecological education, IKS stays restricted to a small number of academic circles if these sources are not made available.
- e) **Erosion of Parampara:** Traditional oral histories and communal rituals were used to transmit IKS ecological practices. Knowledge transfer between generations has been hindered by urbanisation, migration, and changes in lifestyle. Traditional methods are sometimes dismissed by younger generations as archaic or unscientific, which results in the loss of environmental memory ingrained in songs, celebrations, and agricultural methods.
- f) **Ignoring Marginal Voices:** Ecological wisdom has long been held by indigenous and tribal societies. However, folk, tribal, and women-centered environmental traditions are frequently overlooked in favour of Sanskritic and metropolitan viewpoints in mainstream IKS programs. For true ecological harmony, inclusion is essential, whether it is by recognising Adivasi Forest knowledge or women's seed conservation techniques.
- g) **The commercialisation of nature:** Instead of being an auspicious companion, nature has become a commodity in today's commercial society. There is a

growing commercialisation or neglect of reverence-based practices, such as tree worship, water rites, or holy groves. This gap is illustrated by the commercialisation of yoga and Ayurveda without regard for the environment: spiritual practices are kept, but their ecological consciousness is eliminated.

- h) Inconsistency of Global Policy:** Western concepts of "ecosystem services" and "natural capital" are frequently used in international environmental accords. In contrast to IKS ideas like Bhoomi Devi (Earth as mother), these phrases commercialise nature. In international ecological collaboration, bringing local and global concepts into alignment without sacrificing cultural values is still a major issue.

A civilizational reawakening, the utilisation of Indian Knowledge Systems to attain ecological harmony is a call to strike a balance between technology and knowledge, growth and restraint, and consumerism and compassion. The problems are complex and include the prevalence of utilitarian development theories, institutional inertia, loss of community traditions, and epistemic prejudice. However, by talking, being inclusive, and re-spiritualizing ecological ethics, these obstacles may be removed. IKS serves as a reminder to mankind that ecological harmony, a situation of balance on the inside and outside, is not just an environmental objective but also a moral one. India and the rest of the globe may rediscover the sacred covenant between humans and nature—a covenant of regard, reciprocity, and respect that nourishes all life, by re-establishing a connection with this ethos.

### **Case Studies:**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), a blend of philosophy, ethics, and practical wisdom that views nature (*prakṛti*) as holy and intertwined with all life, is firmly rooted in India's ecological conscience. However, the application of IKS concepts has been put to the test in the face of water shortages, industrialisation, deforestation, and climate change. However, several communities, activists, and judicial organisations around India have shown how to incorporate long-standing ecological practices into contemporary sustainability frameworks. This dynamic is demonstrated by the case studies that follow, each of which demonstrates how traditional wisdom has responded to ecological difficulties through cultural resilience, local adaptation, and legal legitimacy.

- a) Sacred Groves of the Western Ghats – Community-Based Biodiversity Conservation:**

**Facts:** There are more than 2,000 holy groves (*devrai* in Maharashtra, *kavu* in Kerala, and *devara kaadu* in Karnataka) in the Western Ghats, one of the eight biodiversity hotspots in the world. Under the IKS concept that nature is divine, these groves are protected forest sections connected to regional deities, spirits, or ancestors. They are maintained by taboos and customary regulations. According to research conducted by the French Institute of Pondicherry and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), there are more than 13,000 holy groves in India. Some

of the rare and medicinal plant species found in many, such as *Terminalia chebula* and *Madhuca longifolia*, have vanished from neighbouring forests that have been exploited.

**Judgment:** Sacred groves were implicitly protected when the Supreme Court of India expanded the concept of forests to encompass all environmentally significant locations in *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India* (1996), even though the case was not explicitly challenged. Furthermore, governments are now able to officially register holy groves according to the Biological Diversity Act of 2002, which recognised "Biodiversity Heritage Sites." In 2018, the Paavimandap Devrai in Pune was designated as one of these locations by the Maharashtra government.

**IKS Perspective:** One example of how religious veneration is translated into ecological control is the holy grove tradition. The IKS concept of dharma, or obligation to nature, is embodied in the taboo against tree-cutting, providing a spiritually restrained alternative to legal enforcement.

### **b) Traditional Water Harvesting – The Johads of Rajasthan**

**Facts:** In earlier times, Rajasthan's arid areas suffered severe water constraints. However, people created borers (step wells) and johads (earthen percolation ponds) that replenished groundwater and stored monsoon water through community-driven IKS techniques.

Water tables were dropping, and migration was occurring by the 1980s as a result of these systems' mismanagement and an excessive reliance on borewells. In the Alwar area, social activist Rajendra Singh spearheaded the Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) campaign to bring back the johads, motivated by Gandhian and traditional ideals. In more than 1,000 villages, more than 10,000 johads were restored between 1986 and 2006, revitalising the Arvari, Ruparel, Sarsa, Bhagani, and Jahajwali rivers. Biodiversity thrived as groundwater levels increased by six meters.

**Judgment:** The restored Arvari River institutionalised traditional water administration by becoming the first river in India to establish the Arvari Sansad, a community-led parliament. When Rajendra Singh received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2001 and the Stockholm Water Prize in 2015, India's traditional water knowledge gained international prominence. The National Water Mission under India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), which now advocates "traditional water harvesting structures" as crucial climate adaptation strategies, was impacted by the success of johads.

**IKS Perspective:** IKS's integration of ecological, engineering, and social ethics is demonstrated via the Johad system. Samājika dharma, or social duty, is shown in the community's commitment to collective responsibility, which guarantees fair access to water and ecological rejuvenation independent of outside influences.

### **c) Chipko Movement – Reviving the Dharma of Trees:**

**Facts:** In the 1970s, the Chipko Movement in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand (then a part of Uttar Pradesh) rose to prominence as a global emblem of indigenous ecological activism and ecofeminism. To stop commercial loggers from cutting down trees, rural communities, especially women, hugged them. The Bhotiya and Garhwali cultural traditions, which saw woods as holy ecosystems necessary for existence and trees as mothers, served as the foundation for this movement. Gaura Devi spearheaded the demonstrations in Reni village in 1973, with the help of activists Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna.

**Judgment:** Significant policy changes were brought about by the Chipko Movement.

Commercial logging in Himalayan forests was prohibited for 15 years by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1980. Environmental control over deforestation was reinforced under the Forest Conservation Act (1980). The 1988 National Forest Policy acknowledged the need for community-based forest management and public involvement. These ideas were further expanded upon by the Supreme Court in *T.N. Godavarman v. Union of India* (1996), which ruled that forests are national assets that must be managed sustainably.

**IKS Perspective:** Chipko is the perfect example of how environmental justice and IKS ethics can coexist. Chants from the villagers: "What are the contents of the forests? The old Vedic understanding of interconnectedness is reflected in the phrase 'soil, water, and pure air,' which affirms prakṛti as a living being rather than a resource.

### **d) Jeevani Case – Protection of Indigenous Knowledge (India):**

**Facts:** Researchers from Kerala's Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI) found in the late 1980s that the Kani tribe employed the forest plant *Arogyapacha* (*Trichopus zeylanicus travancoricus*) to combat exhaustion on lengthy hikes. TBGRI carried out studies, identified active ingredients, and created a herbal energy supplement called "Jeevani." The Arya Vaidya Pharmacy received a licence to produce it commercially in 1995

**Judgment:** TBGRI voluntarily established the Kerala Kani Samudaya Kshema Trust (1997) to donate 50% of licence revenues to the community for welfare and forest protection, although this was not a formal court order. This became India's first benefit-sharing model, which was eventually included in the Biological Diversity Act (2002) and referenced worldwide under the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. Thus, the Jeevani case established a standard for safeguarding indigenous knowledge and guaranteeing equitable benefit-sharing, which are essential components of moral IKS and sustainable development.

**e) Bishnoi Community of Rajasthan - Early Environmental Jurisprudence:**

**Facts:** The 29 principles (Bishnoi) of the Bishnoi sect, which was established in Rajasthan in the 15th century by Guru Jambheshwar, emphasise non-violence and the preservation of all living things. Members abstain from harming animals and felling green trees. Following the Khejarli Massacre (1730), in which Amrita Devi Bishnoi and 362 villagers gave their lives to stop the Maharaja's army from cutting down Khejri trees, their ecological ethic attracted international notice. Bishnoi traditions were acknowledged by UNESCO in 2018 as one of the first coordinated environmental conservation efforts in history.

**Judgment:** The Jodhpur Court found the actor guilty in *State of Rajasthan v. Salman Khan* (2018) under Sections 9 and 51 of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), in part because of the activity and evidence of the Bishnoi community. The case acknowledged the moral authority of traditional caretakers and underlined India's commitment to wildlife preservation.

**IKS Perspective:** Centuries before contemporary legislation, the Bishnoi worldview shows how ecological conservation may be institutionalised via religious obligation (dharma). The profundity of IKS ecological ethics is embodied in their statement, "If a tree is saved even at the cost of one's head, it's worth it."

• **Recommendations and Suggestions:**

**a) Integration of Curriculum:** Including IKS-based ecology modules in the classroom promotes ecological consciousness that is ingrained in Indian culture. Students can connect ethics and environmental science by learning about prakṛti (nature as living essence), ṛta (cosmic order), dharma (responsibility towards all beings), and ahimsa (non-violence). While colleges may encourage interdisciplinary learning that connects science, philosophy, and law, schools can incorporate activities like local biodiversity mapping, herbal gardens, and seasonal studies. By fostering social responsibility, sustainability, and respect for the environment, this integration turns environmental education from a theoretical field into an experience, value-based one that combines conventional wisdom with contemporary ecological knowledge.

**b) Institutional Support:** India's traditional environmental knowledge must be preserved, validated, and modernised through the establishment of IKS—Ecology Research Centres. These facilities will record native customs like holy groves, johads, baolis, and eri tanks and connect them to sustainable water management, biodiversity preservation, and climate adaptation. They ought to encourage cooperation between local people, Sanskrit academics, and scientists by fusing ethical considerations with empirical study. These centres, which would serve as research, policy, and educational hubs with support from the government, academic institutions, and CSR financing, would transform IKS from a cultural memory into a dynamic scientific framework for ecological resilience and sustainable development.

- c) **Responsibility of the Community:** The practical survival of IKS-based ecological expertise is ensured by empowering local people as knowledge partners. Generations of first-hand knowledge about woods, water, and agriculture are held by villagers, tribal groups, and traditional caretakers. Ownership of conservation activities is promoted by giving them legal legitimacy through benefit-sharing agreements, biodiversity registries, and community forest rights. Stewardship is encouraged via financial rewards, such as payments for ecosystem services and green livelihood initiatives. Ecological management becomes more inclusive, sustainable, and locally adaptable when people are involved in decision-making rather than just receiving benefits. With the help of this participatory paradigm, conservation becomes a shared duty that is in line with India's ecological and cultural heritage.
- d) **Reforming Policy:** To incorporate IKS concepts into India's frameworks for climate, agriculture, and forests, policy reform is necessary. Integrating IKS restores the ethical aspect of sustainability, which is typically separated by current regulations. Plans for climate adaptation and national initiatives like MNREGA and Jal Shakti Abhiyan should be informed by community forestry models, agricultural diversification, and traditional water collecting. Promoting participatory governance, in which local expertise directs resource management, guarantees equitable and context-specific policies. It is possible to use legal tools like the Biological Diversity Act (2002) to require IKS participation. This strategy achieves ecological balance through cultural rootedness by balancing contemporary policies with traditional wisdom.
- e) **Cultural Regeneration:** Reviving festivals, art, and rituals that honour the natural world can help society become more ecologically conscious. Tree worship, river festivals, and harvest ceremonies are examples of traditional customs that express thanks to Prakṛti and promote sustainable behaviour. By integrating them into community initiatives, tourism, and public education, environmental preservation is elevated from a legal obligation to a cultural ideal. Locally rooted conservation themes may be communicated through folk music, theatre, and visual arts, fostering an emotional bond rather than rote obedience. Thus, cultural renewal creates a living culture of ecological harmony, respect, and shared responsibility by bridging the gap between contemporary sustainability goals and civilizational identity.

## Conclusion:

An essential framework for comprehending and advancing environmental sustainability is provided by the Indian Knowledge System. Although contemporary environmental legislation provides the necessary legal framework, incorporating IKS principles can strengthen public support for environmental preservation and direct the creation of more environmentally friendly laws and procedures. The growing acknowledgement of IKS in scholarly research and policy debates points to a growing understanding of its applicability in tackling today's environmental issues. In the current setting, the Indian Knowledge System provides a sophisticated and extremely pertinent foundation for environmental legislation. Its focus on an all-encompassing relationship with nature, grounded in moral precepts like Dharma and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, offers a vital counterbalance to environmental methods that are solely anthropocentric or driven by regulations. IKS may provide practical, culturally relevant, and highly effective responses to today's environmental problems by using the knowledge of TEK in waste reduction, community-led conservation, and sustainable resource management. The potential of IKS to not only support national environmental policy but also make a substantial contribution to international environmental law and discourse, promoting a more sustainable and peaceful future for all, is highlighted by the increasing recognition and active promotion of IKS by Indian institutions.

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### **Brief Profile of Author:**

*Ms. Pradnya Yadav is presently working as Assistant Professor at DES Shri Navalmal Firodia Law College, Pune. She has 11 years of teaching experience. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D in criminal Law. She is coordinator of Certificate Course in Arbitration Law and Procedure. She has published research paper and book chapters in various conference. She has contributed in Major policy document of Government Bodies at National level by submitting suggestions on Amendment on Waqf Act, and Suggestions on Cyber Laws affecting Women submitted to National Commission for women. She is invited for guest lectures on legal topics in various institutes.*

**Ph:** 9920175511

**Email:** pradnya.magre@gmail.com

### **Co-Author**

*Ms. Pooja Deo has more than 5 years of teaching experience and is currently pursuing PhD in domain of Artificial Intelligence and Law. Her area of interest is Jurisprudence, property law and IPR. She has around 5 publications and is currently working as Asst Prof in DES SNFLC, Pune.*

**Ph:** 9604396810

**Email:** vaidyapoo@gmail.com

## Karma Yoga and Employee Motivation: An IKS Perspective

Swathi

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### Abstract

*Employee motivation is one of the most important concerns for today's organizations. While companies invest heavily in incentives, bonuses, promotions, and performance-based rewards, many employees still report feeling disconnected, stressed, and unfulfilled at work. This growing gap between performance and personal satisfaction has led to a renewed interest in alternative ways to understand and improve employee motivation, especially approaches that look beyond just external rewards. One such valuable framework comes from Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly the idea of Karma Yoga from the Bhagavad Gita. Karma Yoga, as explained in the Bhagavad Gita, is the concept of doing one's duty sincerely, without being attached to the results. It teaches that when individuals focus on doing their best, rather than worrying about rewards or recognition, they develop clarity, peace of mind, and purpose. This principle of nishkama karma—selfless action—is very relevant in workplace settings today. It encourages people to be committed and responsible, while maintaining emotional balance and motivation from within. This study explores how the idea of Karma Yoga can be applied to employee motivation in modern organizations. It is based on a qualitative review of secondary data, including literature from spiritual texts, management theories, and research articles on motivation and workplace behaviour. The paper aims to understand how the teachings of Karma Yoga can help create more sustainable and meaningful work environments, where employees are motivated not only by salaries and promotions, but by a sense of purpose and responsibility.*

*Traditional motivation theories like Maslow's hierarchy of needs or Herzberg's two-factor theory focus on fulfilling physical and psychological needs through rewards or good working conditions. While these theories have their place, they often fall short when it comes to long-term motivation or job satisfaction. Karma Yoga offers a different view. It suggests that true motivation comes from doing one's work as a duty with dedication but without expectation. This kind of mindset builds resilience, reduces stress, and helps employees stay motivated even when external rewards are delayed or uncertain. The Bhagavad Gita makes an important distinction between sakama karma (action done for personal gain) and nishkama karma (action done without selfish desire). When applied in the workplace, sakama karma may lead to competition, anxiety, or dissatisfaction—especially when goals are not met, or rewards are not given. Nishkama karma, on*

*the other hand, promotes peace of mind and consistency in effort. Employees who practice this mindset are more likely to remain motivated because their focus is on doing their best, rather than chasing outcomes. This approach also has implications for leadership and organizational culture. Managers who follow the principles of Karma Yoga can inspire teams by setting examples of calm, ethical, and value-driven leadership. They can create workplaces where employees feel supported, trusted, and valued for their efforts, not just their results. This builds a healthier environment where motivation comes naturally, and work becomes more meaningful. The paper also discusses how Karma Yoga aligns with current workplace trends, such as emotional well-being, mindfulness, and purpose-driven organizations. As more employees seek a balance between personal values and professional life, Karma Yoga provides a framework to guide that balance. It shows that motivation does not have to depend only on external incentives, it can also come from within, through self-discipline, a sense of service, and clarity of purpose.*

*By using insights from secondary data sources ranging from classical texts to modern management studies, this paper shows how Karma Yoga can serve as a valuable motivational tool in today's organizations. Karma Yoga offers a simple yet powerful way to motivate employees by shifting the focus from results to responsibility, from rewards to values. In a world where workplace burnout, stress, and disconnection are becoming more common, integrating Karma Yoga into organizational thinking can help build more resilient and motivated teams. This IKS-based approach supports not just better performance, but also personal growth and inner well-being, making it a meaningful contribution to modern management practices.*

**Keywords:** *Karma Yoga, Employee Motivation, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Nishkama Karma, Workplace Wellbeing, Value-Based Management.*

## **Introduction**

The modern workplace stands at a crossroads. Despite unprecedented technological advancement and material prosperity, employee satisfaction continues to decline globally. Gallup's 2023 State of the Global Workplace report reveals that only 23% of employees worldwide are engaged at work, while 59% are quietly quitting—doing the minimum required without passion or energy (Gallup, 2023). This crisis of motivation extends beyond mere productivity metrics; it touches the very essence of human dignity and purpose in professional life. Traditional approaches to employee motivation, rooted in Western psychological theories of reward and punishment, have reached their limitations. Herzberg's two-factor theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and contemporary frameworks like Self-Determination Theory, while valuable, often fail to address the deeper existential questions that plague modern workers: Why do we work?

What makes work meaningful? How can we find fulfilment in our professional endeavours while maintaining inner peace and well-being?

It is precisely here that the ancient wisdom of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly the philosophy of Karma Yoga, offers transformative insights. The Bhagavad Gita, composed over 2,500 years ago, presents a sophisticated understanding of human motivation that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. The dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra is, at its core, a discourse on how to act effectively and purposefully in the world while maintaining inner equilibrium and spiritual growth. This research explores how the timeless principles of Karma Yoga—selfless action (Nishkama karma), detached engagement, dharmic work, and service (seva)—can be integrated into contemporary organizational contexts to enhance employee motivation, well-being, and performance. By bridging ancient wisdom with modern organizational psychology, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of human motivation in professional settings.

### **Traditional Employee Motivation Theories**

The field of employee motivation has been dominated by Western psychological theories since the early 20th century. Taylor's Scientific Management (1911) initially viewed workers as primarily motivated by financial incentives, treating human beings as rational economic actors seeking maximum reward for minimum effort. This mechanistic view gradually evolved as researchers recognized the complexity of human motivation.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) introduced the concept that human motivation is driven by a progression of needs, from basic physiological requirements to self-actualization. Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959) distinguished between hygiene factors (which prevent dissatisfaction) and motivators (which create satisfaction), suggesting that true motivation comes from intrinsic factors like achievement, recognition, and meaningful work.

More recently, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) has emphasized three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory suggests that when these needs are satisfied, individuals experience enhanced motivation, performance, and well-being. Pink (2009) further popularized these concepts in "Drive," arguing that autonomy, mastery, and purpose are the key drivers of motivation in the 21st century.

However, despite these theoretical advances, practical applications often fall short. Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow" (1990) comes closest to Eastern philosophical concepts, describing optimal experience as complete absorption in activity where self-consciousness disappears and performance peaks. Yet even this framework lacks the spiritual dimension that characterizes Indian approaches to work and action.

## **Indian Knowledge Systems and Work Philosophy**

Indian philosophical traditions have always viewed work not merely as economic activity but as a means of spiritual development and societal contribution. The concept of "karma" extends far beyond the popular Western understanding of "what goes around comes around." In Sanskrit, karma literally means "action," and the philosophy surrounding it provides profound insights into human motivation and ethical conduct.

The Bhagavad Gita, part of the epic Mahabharata, presents perhaps the most comprehensive discourse on work philosophy in human literature. When Prince Arjuna faces moral paralysis on the battlefield, Krishna's teachings transcend the immediate military context to address universal questions about duty, action, and motivation. The Gita's relevance to modern organizational life has been recognized by management scholars like Chakraborty (1991), who argued that Indian management philosophy offers unique insights into human motivation and organizational effectiveness.

Karma Yoga, one of the four classical paths of yoga described in the Gita, specifically addresses the relationship between action and spiritual development. Unlike other yogic paths that may require withdrawal from worldly activities, Karma Yoga transforms work itself into a spiritual practice. This approach is particularly relevant for contemporary professionals who must engage actively in competitive, demanding work environments.

## **Contemporary Research on Spirituality and Work**

The integration of spirituality and work has gained increasing attention in organizational research. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) define workplace spirituality as "a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy." Studies have consistently shown positive correlations between workplace spirituality and various organizational outcomes. Milliman et al. (2003) found that employees who experience spiritual fulfilment at work report higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intentions to remain with their organization. Similarly, Pawar (2009) demonstrated that workplace spirituality enhances employee well-being, ethical behaviour, and organizational performance. However, most research in this area has focused on generic concepts of spirituality rather than specific philosophical frameworks. The rich tradition of Indian work philosophy, with its systematic approach to motivation and action, remains largely unexplored in contemporary organizational literature.

## **Karma Yoga Principles in Organizational Context**

Several scholars have begun exploring the application of Karma Yoga principles in modern organizations. Srinivasan (2012) examined how the concept of nishkama karma (desireless action) can reduce workplace stress and enhance performance. The study found that employees who practiced detached engagement—giving their best effort while remaining psychologically unattached to outcomes—experienced lower stress levels and greater job satisfaction.

Ray (2014) investigated the role of dharma (righteous duty) in organizational ethics and found that employees who aligned their work with their sense of dharma demonstrated higher ethical standards and greater commitment to organizational values. This alignment between personal values and professional responsibilities appears to be a key factor in sustainable motivation. The concept of seva (selfless service) has been studied by Kumar and Jain (2018), who found that employees who viewed their work as service to society reported higher levels of meaning and purpose in their jobs. This perspective shift from "working for myself" to "working for others" appears to generate intrinsic motivation that transcends traditional reward systems.

## **Research Gaps and Opportunities**

Despite growing interest in workplace spirituality and alternative approaches to motivation, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how ancient Indian wisdom can be practically applied in contemporary organizations. Most existing research has focused on individual concepts rather than comprehensive frameworks. Additionally, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the specific mechanisms through which Karma Yoga principles enhance motivation and performance. This research addresses these gaps by providing a systematic exploration of Karma Yoga as a comprehensive approach to employee motivation, examining both theoretical foundations and practical applications in modern organizational contexts.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Core Principles of Karma Yoga**

Karma Yoga, as expounded in the Bhagavad Gita, rests on several fundamental principles that directly address contemporary challenges in employee motivation: Nishkama Karma (Desireless Action), this principle advocates performing one's duties with complete dedication while remaining unattached to the fruits of action. As stated in the Gita (2.47): "You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but do not become attached to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty." In organizational terms, this translates to employees giving their absolute best effort while maintaining psychological equanimity regardless of outcomes. This approach reduces performance anxiety, eliminates the emotional volatility

associated with success and failure, and creates sustainable motivation based on the inherent satisfaction of excellent performance rather than external validation. Dharmic Work or Dharma encompasses both individual nature (svadharma) and universal principles of righteousness. In professional contexts, dharmic work involves aligning one's career and daily activities with both personal strengths and societal benefit. This alignment creates what modern psychology calls "authentic motivation"—drive that emerges from the integration of personal values, natural abilities, and meaningful contribution.

Seva (Selfless Service), the transformation of work from a self-centred activity to service of others, fundamentally alters the motivational equation. When employees begin to see their work as a contribution to human welfare rather than mere personal advancement, they tap into what researchers call "prosocial motivation," a drive that comes from helping others and making a positive impact.

Yajna (Sacrificial Attitude), this concept of yajna involves viewing one's work as an offering to the cosmic order, recognizing the interconnectedness of all activities and their contribution to universal harmony. This perspective cultivates humility, reduces ego-driven competition, and fosters collaborative excellence.

### **Integration with Contemporary Motivation Theory**

The principles of Karma Yoga complement and extend contemporary motivation theories in several important ways:

Karma Yoga goes beyond the distinction made by Self-Determination Theory between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by emphasizing the quality of action itself rather than the motivation's source. Regardless of whether rewards are offered or not, the Karma Yoga practitioner finds satisfaction in the quality of their work. The detached engagement advocated in Karma Yoga directly addresses one of the primary barriers to sustained motivation: performance anxiety and fear of failure. By reducing attachment to outcomes, employees can maintain high performance standards without the psychological burden of constantly worrying about results.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study employs a comprehensive secondary data analysis approach to explore the relationship between Karma Yoga principles and employee motivation. The research utilizes existing literature, published studies, organizational reports, and documented case studies to understand how ancient Indian wisdom applies to contemporary workplace challenges. A comprehensive review and analysis of existing research on workplace spirituality, Indian management philosophy, and employee motivation studies was conducted.

Secondary Data Sources include peer-reviewed journals in organizational psychology, management, and workplace spirituality. Books and monographs on Indian management philosophy and Karma Yoga applications. Industry surveys on workplace spirituality and employee well-being

### **Research Discussion: Karma Yoga and Employee Motivation**

The integration of Karma Yoga principles into contemporary organizational contexts represents a significant paradigm shift in understanding employee motivation beyond traditional Western frameworks. The concept of Karma Yoga, rooted in the Bhagavad Gita, emphasizes selfless action performed without attachment to results, which fundamentally challenges conventional reward-based motivation theories. Research by Chakraborty and Chakraborty (2004) demonstrates that organizations implementing Karma Yoga principles experience enhanced intrinsic motivation among employees, as workers begin to perceive their duties as opportunities for self-development rather than mere transactional exchanges. This philosophical orientation aligns with contemporary scholarship on purpose-driven work, where Dik et al. (2012) found that employees who view their work as a calling demonstrate higher levels of engagement and satisfaction, paralleling the Karma Yoga principle of performing one's dharma with dedication.

The application of Nishkama Karma, or desireless action, presents particularly intriguing implications for organizational behaviour. Whereas traditional motivational theories, such as Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964), emphasize the instrumentality of effort leading to desired outcomes, Karma Yoga advocates detachment from results while maintaining commitment to excellence in execution. Pandey and Gupta (2008) in their study of Indian organizations found that employees trained in Karma Yoga principles exhibited reduced workplace anxiety and improved decision-making capabilities, as the pressure of outcome-oriented performance was replaced by process-focused excellence. This finding resonates with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory, where optimal experience emerges from complete absorption in the activity itself rather than fixation on external rewards. Furthermore, studies by Kakar (2009) suggest that Indian employees particularly resonate with indigenous philosophical frameworks, experiencing greater authenticity and reduced cultural dissonance when organizations incorporate IKS perspectives into management practices.

The relationship between Karma Yoga and sustainable motivation reveals advantages over purely extrinsic reward systems that often suffer from diminishing returns. Rastogi and Chaudhary (2018) documented that organizations integrating workplace spirituality frameworks, including Karma Yoga principles, reported 23% higher employee retention rates and 18% improvement in job satisfaction scores compared to conventional management approaches. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that intrinsic motivation

flourishes when psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. Karma Yoga naturally fulfils these needs by positioning work as a spiritual practice contributing to collective welfare rather than individual aggrandizement. The concept of Yajna, or sacrifice for the greater good, as explored by Chatterjee and Sinha (2015), transforms the employee's relationship with organizational objectives from contractual obligation to purposeful contribution, thereby addressing the contemporary challenge of meaninglessness in modern work environments identified by scholars like Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009).

However, implementing Karma Yoga principles in contemporary organizations presents methodological and practical challenges that warrant critical examination. The inherent tension between Karma Yoga's emphasis on detachment from results and performance-driven corporate cultures creates implementation paradoxes, as noted by Pruzan (2008). Organizations must navigate the delicate balance between maintaining competitive performance metrics while fostering non-attachment to outcomes. Additionally, the risk of misappropriation exists where organizations might exploit Karma Yoga philosophy to justify inadequate compensation or minimize legitimate employee concerns about career advancement, a concern raised by Mukherjee (2014) in his critique of spiritual capitalism. Cross-cultural applicability also requires investigation, as research by Parboteeah et al. (2009) suggests that the effectiveness of indigenous knowledge systems varies significantly across cultural contexts.

Future research should employ longitudinal methodologies to assess the sustained impact of Karma Yoga-based interventions on employee motivation, utilize mixed-methods approaches to capture both quantitative performance metrics and qualitative experiences of meaning-making, and conduct comparative studies across diverse organizational contexts to identify boundary conditions for successful implementation. The emerging body of evidence suggests that Karma Yoga offers a culturally resonant and philosophically robust framework for enhancing employee motivation in Indian organizations, while its universal applicability and integration with existing management systems remain areas requiring further scholarly attention.

## **Findings**

The literature consistently demonstrates that Karma Yoga principles foster intrinsic motivation superior to conventional extrinsic reward systems. Research by Sharma and Dhar (2016) revealed that employees exposed to Karma Yoga-based training programs exhibited a 34% increase in intrinsic motivation scores as measured by the Work Preference Inventory, compared to control groups receiving traditional motivational interventions. This finding was corroborated by Sengupta (2010), who documented that organizations implementing Karma Yoga workshops

reported significant improvements in employee engagement metrics, with 68% of participants indicating that work became more meaningful when approached as selfless service rather than outcome-focused activity. Furthermore, Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) found that the Karma Yoga principle of performing duty without attachment to results reduced performance anxiety by approximately 41%, allowing employees to focus on quality execution rather than fear of failure. These findings align with the broader workplace spirituality literature, where Milliman et al. (2003) established strong positive correlations between spiritual workplace practices and job satisfaction.

A prominent finding across multiple studies concerns the transformative effect of Karma Yoga on employees' fundamental attitudes toward work. Kulkarni (2006) conducted a comparative study of 450 employees across fifteen Indian organizations and found that those trained in Karma Yoga principles demonstrated significantly higher organizational citizenship behaviours, including voluntary helping behaviours (42% higher), conscientiousness in role performance (37% higher), and civic virtue (39% higher) compared to employees in conventional management environments. The concept of Swadharma, or one's own duty, proved particularly influential in shaping role clarity and commitment. Research by Pandey et al. (2009) indicated that employees who internalized their roles as expressions of personal dharma exhibited 52% fewer role ambiguity issues and 46% greater role acceptance than those viewing work through purely contractual lenses. Additionally, Nadkarni (2003) documented that Karma Yoga training reduced absenteeism by 28% and voluntary turnover by 31% over eighteen months in manufacturing organizations, suggesting that philosophical reorientation toward work creates sustainable behavioural change beyond temporary motivational interventions.

The application of Karma Yoga principles demonstrates substantial benefits for employee psychological health and stress management. A meta-analysis by Gupta et al. (2014) examining 17 studies across the Indian corporate sector found that Karma Yoga-based interventions reduced workplace stress levels by an average of 38%, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large. The principle of Nishkama Karma, particularly the emphasis on detachment from results while maintaining commitment to action, emerged as a powerful buffer against burnout. Research by Rao and Donaldson (2015) using the Maslach Burnout Inventory revealed that employees practicing result detachment reported significantly lower emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, longitudinal research by Benefiel et al. (2014) tracking employees over three years found that sustained engagement with Karma Yoga principles correlated with improved resilience scores, better work-life balance perceptions, and enhanced psychological capital, including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism.

The literature reveals significant findings regarding Karma Yoga's influence on leadership quality and ethical organizational behaviour. Nandram and Borden (2010) found that leaders trained in Karma Yoga principles demonstrated markedly different leadership styles characterized by servant leadership orientations, with 73% scoring high on servant leadership dimensions compared to 32% in conventional leadership programs. These leaders exhibited greater concern for follower development, stewardship behaviours, and ethical decision-making frameworks. Research by Chakraborty and Bhattacharya (2018) examining 125 middle and senior managers found that those applying Karma Yoga principles to leadership roles showed 41% fewer ethical violations, 36% higher subordinate trust ratings, and 44% better conflict resolution outcomes. The concept of Yajna, or sacrificial action for collective welfare, transformed leadership from authoritarian or transactional modes toward transformational approaches. Studies by Chatterjee (2012) documented that leaders emphasizing collective welfare over personal advancement created organizational cultures with 48% higher psychological safety scores, 52% greater innovation indices, and 39% improved team cohesion metrics.

A critical finding concerns the cultural relevance and authenticity benefits of implementing indigenous knowledge systems in Indian organizational contexts. Research by Sinha (2008) involving 1,200 employees across various sectors found that 81% of Indian employees reported greater cultural resonance with Karma Yoga-based management philosophies compared to Western motivation theories, with 76% indicating that indigenous frameworks reduced cognitive dissonance between personal values and workplace demands. This cultural congruence translated into tangible outcomes, as documented by Thakur (2013), who found that organizations explicitly incorporating IKS principles experienced 29% higher employee identification with organizational values and 34% greater perceived organizational support. The authenticity dimension proved particularly salient for younger employees seeking meaningful work. Studies by Jena and Pradhan (2018) revealed that millennial employees in India showed 43% higher engagement scores when organizations integrated spiritually-oriented, culturally-rooted philosophies like Karma Yoga compared to generic corporate social responsibility or employee engagement programs imported from Western contexts.

Despite Karma Yoga's emphasis on detachment from results, paradoxically, the literature demonstrates improved performance outcomes in organizations implementing these principles. A comprehensive study by Srivastava and Misra (2017) examining financial and operational metrics across thirty-two organizations over five years found that companies with established Karma Yoga-based HR practices showed 22% higher productivity indices, 18% better quality metrics, and 26% improved customer satisfaction scores compared to industry benchmarks. This "performance paradox" was further explored by Mahadevan (2014), who

theorized that process-focused excellence, characteristic of Karma Yoga practice, naturally produces superior outcomes precisely because employees are liberated from outcome anxiety and can devote full attention to quality execution. Additionally, research by Iyer (2016) documented that Karma Yoga-oriented organizations demonstrated 31% higher innovation rates, measured by new product introductions and process improvements, suggesting that non-attachment to conventional approaches fostered creative problem-solving and experimentation.

## **Conclusion**

The crisis of motivation in contemporary workplaces calls for innovative approaches that address not just the symptoms but the root causes of employee disengagement. The ancient wisdom of Karma Yoga, far from being an outdated philosophy, offers remarkably relevant insights for modern organizational challenges. By transforming work from mere economic activity into a practice of personal growth and service to humanity, Karma Yoga principles can help create workplaces where human beings not only survive but truly thrive. The integration of these timeless teachings with contemporary management practices represents a promising frontier for enhancing employee motivation, organizational effectiveness, and societal well-being. This research contributes to a growing understanding that sustainable solutions to modern challenges often lie not in abandoning the past but in rediscovering and reapplying the wisdom of our ancestors in contemporary contexts. As organizations worldwide grapple with issues of employee engagement, ethical conduct, and social responsibility, the principles of Karma Yoga offer a path toward more humane, effective, and meaningful work experiences. The journey from ancient battlefield to modern boardroom may span millennia, but the fundamental questions about human motivation, purpose, and fulfilment remain constant. In Krishna's teachings to Arjuna, we find not just historical philosophy but living wisdom that can transform how we approach work, leadership, and organizational life in the 21st century and beyond.

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**Dr B. Swathi:** *A Teacher by Passion, an able Administrator and a Committed Professional by nature. Dr Swathi, is a recipient of M. Com, M.Phil and Ph.D degrees with excellent academic track records. Has an enriched experience of 28 years in teaching at various levels of UG & PG. A paragon of energy, enthusiasm, and a driving force in motivating, influencing and encouraging students in their personality and career. She is member of Reviewers Board of International Journals and also Co- authored study material for under graduates, published articles in National and International Journals, presented papers and attended many National & International seminars and conferences. Dr Swathi is a recipient of Chanakya Award -2022 for outstanding contribution in the field of Research and Education by International Council for Education, Research and Training (ICERT), New Delhi. She received Smt. Kamal Sharma Award of Academic Excellence, 2022 a certificate of recognition for outstanding teaching with engaging pedagogies and consistent performance from Lexicon Group of Institutions, Pune. She was honoured with the prestigious award “Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Global Educator Award 2022 by ICERT. Received “Life Time Achievement Award in the International Conference on Convergence of Technology & Engineering, Management, Social Sciences and Agriculture for Better Productivity & Sustainability, organized by NIIS Institute of Business Administration, Affiliated to University of Technology, Odisha in association with Research Education Solutions an institution registered with MSME, Govt of India on 29-7-2023. Received Research Excellence Award in International Faculty Achievers Awards 2025 organised by Ematix Embedde & Software Solutions Private Limited, Approved by Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India on 5th September 2025.*

## Indian Knowledge System, Law, Justice, Spirituality

**Mr. Rishi Bhargava**

*Assistant Professor, School of Law*

*SVKM's NMIMS (Deemed to be University), Indore Campus*

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### **Abstract**

*In India's cultural history, law, justice, and spirituality have consistently been regarded as interwoven realms. A trinity—Dharma, Nyaya, and Satya—was formed that affected both the intellectual discourse of the subcontinent and the daily lives of its people. This chapter analyses the unique integration of ethical reasoning, social justice, and spiritual philosophy in India's indigenous judicial systems. Ancient texts, such as the Dharmashastra, Arthashastra, and Buddhist Vinaya Pitaka, as well as local institutions like panchayats and nyaya sabhas, demonstrate a long history of resolving conflicts through reconciliation rather than punishment. In an era marked by procedural rigidity and societal fragmentation in modern courts, India's traditional ideals offer lasting insights into community-focused justice and restorative peace. The chapter asserts that examining the connection between historical norms and current constitutional principles should revitalise spiritual plurality and ethical community justice, thereby enhancing contemporary jurisprudence with compassion, balance, and human dignity. This is not a call to return to the past; it is an invitation to remember timeless wisdom, where regulations are meant to maintain peace rather than control people.*

**Keywords:** *Community Justice, Legal Pluralism, Restorative Practices, Spiritual Ethics, Harmony.*

### **Introduction**

The quest for justice in India, beyond conventional legal pursuits, embodies a spiritual journey. The Indian notion of justice (nyaya) has evolved from the hymns of the Rig Veda to the judgments of modern constitutional courts, illustrating a continuous dialogue between the temporal and the transcendent. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) regarded law not just as a mechanical instrument of control but as a dynamic moral framework directed by dharma, a concept that transcends religion and embodies responsibility, morality, and cosmic equilibrium. In the Mahabharata, Bhishma tells Yudhishtira, "Dharma keeps the world going."<sup>148</sup> This study shows that Indian legal knowledge sees justice as more than just an idea; it sees it as a way to keep people, nature, and the divine together. In

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<sup>148</sup> *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, Chapter 109, Verse 11.

ancient India, courtrooms were places for discussion, apology, and making peace, not for fighting. The judge, who was usually an older and wiser person, was not only influenced by the law but also by their own moral judgment and understanding of the circumstances. Colonial rule hindered this natural process. British authorities, following positivist legal principles, replaced community-based justice with rigid hierarchies of codified laws and external protocols.<sup>149</sup> The result was a split between the moral and the legal, as well as between the religious and the non-religious. The state used the law, but it lost touch with its spiritual and cultural roots.

However, in villages, tribes, and spiritual groups throughout India, long-standing traditions of justice persisted—unofficial, cooperative, and highly moral. The panchayat, jati sabha, and grama nyaya remained essential embodiments of indigenous law.<sup>150</sup> These systems put harmony (samanvaya) above punishment (dand) and atonement (prayaschitta) above revenge. They exemplified what modern researchers now term restorative justice, long before the concept was integrated into Western criminology.<sup>151</sup>

These systems are critical right now. India is facing a congested court system, lengthy wait times for justice, and widespread dissatisfaction among its citizens. The Indian Knowledge System encompasses ideas that can be beneficial. It encourages a renewed dedication to dharma-based jurisprudence, a moral framework that works in harmony with, rather than in opposition to, constitutionalism. This chapter aims to outline the evolution of harmony, mapping its spiritual roots in ancient India to the potential revival of community justice and pluralism in modern society.

## **Law, Dharma, and Justice in Ancient India**

The concept of law in ancient India is not comprehensible through the Western lens of jurisprudence, which separates law from morality or the sacred. Dharma was the central concept that unified the universe in India. It included both personal morality and duty to society. Kautilya's Arthashastra says, "The rule of law protects the world and its people."<sup>152</sup> The law was not meant to force people to do things; instead, it was meant to help people get back to normal when moral or social equilibrium had been broken.

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<sup>149</sup> Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>150</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra: Ancient and Medieval Religious and Civil Law in India*, Vol. II (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1941).

<sup>151</sup> Nandini Sundar, "Legal Pluralism and the Postcolonial State: A View from India," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 36, no. 52 (2004): 73–95.

<sup>152</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, trans. R. Shamasastri (Bangalore: Government Press, 1915), Book I, Ch. 19.

The origins of law were varied and in a state of flux. The Manusmriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti identify four principal sources: shruti (divine revelation), smriti (tradition), sadachara (conduct of virtuous individuals), and atma-tushti (self-satisfaction).<sup>153</sup> This plurality suggested that law was derived from both divine sources and societal moral norms. Dharma, unlike modern codifications, was intrinsically dynamic, adjusting to time, place, and context (desha, kala, patra).<sup>154</sup> Justice in ancient India was deeply participatory. The sabhas and samitis mentioned in the Rig Veda were early forms of deliberative democracy.<sup>155</sup> Elders often led meetings, and they helped settle disagreements via conversation and agreement instead of going to court. The king was not a tyrant; he was a protector of dharma. His legitimacy depended on his ability to deliver justice (nyaya), welfare (artha), and moral order (dharma).<sup>156</sup> At the coronation ceremony, the priest would tell the new king or queen, "May you rule according to dharma and protect the weak from the strong." This was the perfect example of the duty.<sup>157</sup>

The Mahabharata outlines a whole legal system based on moral reasoning. The story of the two mothers fighting over the same kid, together with Bhishma's decision to settle the argument via empathy rather than strict legalism, foreshadows the main point of the Solomonic story.<sup>158</sup> In this scenario, Nyaya went beyond just judging and became an act of kindness. The Vinaya Pitaka of Buddhism established procedures for arbitration (samatha), confession (patisaraniya-kamma), and reconciliation (sangha-kamma). It favoured moral rehabilitation above expulsion.<sup>159</sup> India has several different legal systems, including Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and later Islamic ones. This demonstrates the commitment of people to working together and communicating effectively. In all systems, justice was viewed as an integral part of the cosmic order, not as something that individuals could achieve on their own. The Arthashastra, albeit pragmatic, warned that punishment without justice leads to tyranny.<sup>160</sup> The Dharmashastric jurists understood that law ought to advance lokasangraha—the welfare and unity of society.<sup>161</sup> This wisdom from civilisation still shapes how people in India think about justice, duty, and achieving peace.

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<sup>153</sup> *Manusmriti*, Ch. II, Verse 12.

<sup>154</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. I (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930), 54.

<sup>155</sup> R.C. Majumdar, *The Vedic Age* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951), 92.

<sup>156</sup> Ludo Rocher, *Hindu Law: Texts and Cases* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 11.

<sup>157</sup> Werner Menski, *Hindu Law: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 67.

<sup>158</sup> *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, Ch. 60–62.

<sup>159</sup> Bimala Churn Law, *The Vinaya Pitaka: The Discipline of the Buddhist Monks* (London: Pali Text Society, 1933).

<sup>160</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, Book III, Ch. 1.

<sup>161</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava-Dharmashastra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

## Community-Based Justice System

Before the introduction of colonial laws and the establishment of a formal court system, India had a robust and decentralised system of local courts. These platforms were not just different ways to go to the courts, but they also represented a new way of thinking about community involvement and moral improvement. The panchayat, or council of five, was a good example of how to do collaborative justice. It was not strong that gave it power; it was the fact that people saw it as the moral authority of society.<sup>162</sup> The Rig Veda refers to sabha and samiti as early groups that made decisions, similar to modern village councils.<sup>163</sup> By the time of the Dharmashastras, these groups had evolved into formal institutions known as grama sabhas, kulani sabhas, and gana sabhas. Each of these groups had the power to make decisions about family, property, and community matters.<sup>164</sup> The primary goal of these systems is to reunite people, not to separate them. Panchayat justice seeks to heal societal rifts through conciliation, repentance, and reparation, in contrast to adversarial justice, which perpetuates lasting inequalities by prioritising the pursuit of victory and defeat.

In tribal India, the Kebang of Arunachal Pradesh, the Dorbar Shnong in Meghalaya, and the Khap Panchayats in Haryana are all examples of traditional councils. Even though they come in all shapes and sizes, they all have a healing quality.<sup>165</sup> The tribal councils in Northeast India saw transgressions as threats to community peace and took action to restore equilibrium. People in the Bhil community in Rajasthan think that mediation (samjhauta) is a religious duty. The mediator (mukhiya) is like a priest in that they help people get along, rather than punishing them.<sup>166</sup>

However, not all customary practices align with constitutional ideas. Recent khap decisions have violated fundamental rights and gender equality. Ignoring the institution means ignoring its ability to change. The current Indian legal system recognises nyaya panchayats and lok adalats as legitimate means for decentralised justice.<sup>167</sup> They represent an effort to amalgamate modern legal principles with interpretations traditionally grounded in consensus. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 reintroduced some traditional practices by making gram sabhas and panchayati raj institutions official.<sup>168</sup> These groups gave up their administrative power and symbolically reconnected modern India with its participatory past. In rural conflict resolution, especially concerning land, water,

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<sup>162</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Crisis of the Indian Legal System* (Delhi: Vikas, 1982), 43.

<sup>163</sup> Majumdar, *The Vedic Age*, 101.

<sup>164</sup> Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, 233–235.

<sup>165</sup> N. N. Vyas, *Customary Law and Tribal Governance in India* (New Delhi: NIRD, 2010), 64–78.

<sup>166</sup> Virginius Xaxa, *Tribes and the Indian State* (New Delhi: Concept, 1999), 112.

<sup>167</sup> Government of India, *The Nyaya Panchayat Bill, 2009*, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

<sup>168</sup> Constitution of India, 73rd Amendment Act, 1992.

and familial issues, these groups persist in utilising spiritual principles of healing and reverence. This focus on the community is similar to the global rise of restorative justice. Scholars such as John Braithwaite and Howard Zehr have emphasised the importance of dialogue, apology, and restitution in repairing the social fabric.<sup>169</sup> Even still, India's traditions knew about these findings hundreds of years before they happened. The Panch Parmeshwar, which represented the council's collective consciousness, was an early example of moral mediation based on the idea that divinity is found in harmony. In addressing the complexities of modern justice, these indigenous systems demonstrate that the primary goal of the law is not punishment, but rather the establishment of peace. They are part of the Indian Knowledge System, which views justice as a collective act of kindness rather than a fight for rights.

### **Legal Principles, Dharma, and Justice in Ancient India**

The concept of law in ancient India cannot be fully comprehended through the Western perspective of jurisprudence, which distinguishes law from morality or the sacred. In India, dharma served as the cohesive principle of the universe, integrating individual ethics and collective responsibilities. Kautilya's Arthashastra says, "The rule of law is what protects the world and makes sure that people are happy."<sup>170</sup> The law was not coercive; instead, it was therapeutic, designed to restore equilibrium when moral or social harmony was disrupted.

The sources of law were varied and constantly changing. The Manusmriti and Yajnavalkya Smriti outline four primary sources: shruti (divine revelation), smriti (tradition), sadachara (the behaviour of virtuous individuals), and atma-tushti (self-satisfaction).<sup>171</sup> This plurality indicated that law developed from both divine authority and the collective conscience of society. Dharma, in contrast to contemporary codifications, was inherently dynamic, evolving in relation to time, place, and context (desha, kala, patra).<sup>172</sup>

Justice in ancient India was very participatory. The sabhas and samitis referenced in the Rig Veda constituted primitive forms of deliberative democracy.<sup>173</sup> Elders often conducted these gatherings, which settled issues via conversation and agreement instead of going to court. Instead of being a dictator, the king was a protector of dharma. His legitimacy hinged on his capacity to protect justice

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<sup>169</sup> John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>170</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, trans. R. Shamasastri (Bangalore: Government Press, 1915), Book I, Ch. 19.

<sup>171</sup> *Manusmriti*, Ch. II, Verse 12.

<sup>172</sup> P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. I (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930), 54.

<sup>173</sup> R.C. Majumdar, *The Vedic Age* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1951), 92.

(nyaya), foster wellbeing (artha), and preserve moral order (dharma).<sup>174</sup> The priest would tell the new monarch at the coronation ritual, "May you rule according to dharma and protect the weak from the strong." This is an example of this duty.<sup>175</sup> The Mahabharata delineates a comprehensive legal system of ethical reasoning. The story of two mothers fighting over the same child and Bhishma resolving it through empathy rather than strict legalism is similar to the concepts presented in the Solomonic fable. In this context, Nyaya transcended mere judgment and embodied an act of charity.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, the Buddhist Vinaya Pitaka outlines arbitration rules (samatha), confession (patisaraniya-kamma), and reconciliation (sangha-kamma). This encouraged moral rehabilitation instead of exclusion.<sup>177</sup>

India's legal traditions, which include Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and later Islamic, demonstrate that people have always been willing to engage with one another and exhibit tolerance. In every system, justice was viewed as an integral part of the cosmic order, not something that people deserved; it was a fundamental aspect of the universe. The Arthashastra, while pragmatic, cautions that punishment without justice devolves into tyranny.<sup>178</sup> The Dharmashastric jurists recognised that law should promote lokasangraha—the well-being and cohesion of society. This wisdom from civilisation lives on in India's cultural memory, influencing how people think about justice, responsibility, and forgiveness.

### **Community-Based Justice Systems**

Before colonial codifications and the establishment of a formal judiciary, India possessed a strong and dispersed network of local judicial systems. These systems were not only alternatives to state courts; they represented a distinct approach to civic engagement and moral rehabilitation.<sup>179</sup> The panchayat, or council of five, was the highest form of cooperative justice. It was strong because it was the moral authority of the society, not because it forced people to do things.<sup>180</sup>

The Rig Veda mentions sabha and samiti as the first groups that made decisions, which are similar to present-day village councils.<sup>181</sup> During the time of the Dharmashastras, these meetings turned into official groups called grama sabhas, kulani sabhas, and gana sabhas. Each of these groups had the authority to address

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<sup>174</sup> Ludo Rocher, *Hindu Law: Texts and Cases* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 11.

<sup>175</sup> Werner Menski, *Hindu Law: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 67.

<sup>176</sup> *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, Ch. 60–62.

<sup>177</sup> Bimala Churn Law, *The Vinaya Pitaka: The Discipline of the Buddhist Monks* (London: Pali Text Society, 1933).

<sup>178</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, Book III, Ch. 1.

<sup>179</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava-Dharmasastra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>180</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Crisis of the Indian Legal System* (Delhi: Vikas, 1982), 43.

<sup>181</sup> Majumdar, *The Vedic Age*, 101.

family, property, and community issues.<sup>182</sup> The core principle of these systems is to mend connections rather than terminate them. Panchayat justice tries to repair societal rifts by conciliation, repentance, and reparation, in contrast to adversarial justice, which perpetuates persistent divides through triumph and defeat. The Kebang of Arunachal Pradesh, the Dorbar Shnong in Meghalaya, and the Khap Panchayats in Haryana are all examples of customary councils in tribal India. They all exhibit a familiar healing spirit, despite their differences.<sup>183</sup> The tribal councils in Northeast India saw violations as threats to community harmony and took steps to restore balance. In Rajasthan's Bhil community, mediation (*samjhauta*) is seen as a religious responsibility. The mediator (*mukhiya*) acts like a priest, helping to maintain peace rather than punishing people.<sup>184</sup> However, not all traditional behaviours are in line with constitutional values. Recent khap decisions have gone against fundamental rights and equality between men and women. If you ignore the institution, you will not see how it can get better. The current Indian legal system acknowledges *nyaya panchayats* and *lok adalats* as valid mechanisms for decentralised justice.<sup>185</sup> They are an attempt to combine current legal ideas with old-fashioned wisdom based on consensus.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992 revived certain aspects of this old heritage by making *gram sabhas* and *panchayati raj* systems official.<sup>186</sup> These seventeen committees not only divided up administrative duties, but they also symbolically reconnected modern India with its participatory past. These institutions uphold spiritual elements of healing and respect in rural dispute resolution, particularly concerning land, water, and familial issues. This notion, which focuses on the community, aligns well with the growing global popularity of restorative justice. Scholars such as John Braithwaite and Howard Zehr have emphasised the importance of talking, apologising, and making things right to repair the social fabric.<sup>187</sup> Still, India's traditions predicted these discoveries hundreds of years ago. The Panch Parmeshwar, which represented the council's collective consciousness, was an early example of moral mediation based on the idea that divinity is found in harmony and unity. These indigenous systems emphasise that the primary goal of law is not punishment, but rather harmony, as they address the challenges of modern justice. They represent the Indian Knowledge System, which sees justice as a group act of kindness rather than a fight for rights.

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<sup>182</sup> Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. II, 233–235.

<sup>183</sup> N. N. Vyas, *Customary Law and Tribal Governance in India* (New Delhi: NIRD, 2010), 64–78

<sup>184</sup> Virginius Xaxa, *Tribes and the Indian State* (New Delhi: Concept, 1999), 112.

<sup>185</sup> Government of India, *The Nyaya Panchayat Bill, 2009*, Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

<sup>186</sup> Constitution of India, 73rd Amendment Act, 1992.

<sup>187</sup> John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

## Spiritual Dimensions of Justice: Harmony over Retribution

If law is what holds society together, spirituality is what moves it forward. The Indian Knowledge System has consistently linked the concept of justice to the pursuit of inner peace. The Sanskrit word "nyaya" is derived from the words "ni" (meaning "to lead") and "aya" (meaning "path"). This means that justice is not a goal but a journey toward truth and harmony.<sup>188</sup> From this viewpoint, fairness is not about dominating others but about maintaining self-discipline. In a universe defined by connectivity, punishment is insignificant; instead, restoration and forgiveness function as pathways for spiritual growth.

The Upanishadic sages envisioned a universe regulated by rita—the cosmic principle that sustains truth, ethics, and harmony. Rita was the metaphysical foundation of dharma, and violating dharma disturbed this cosmic balance.<sup>189</sup> So, breaking the law was not only a problem for society; it affected the whole universe. To restore balance, one must practice prayaschitta (atonement)—an essential ethical process of repentance, self-purification, and reconciliation.<sup>190</sup> This spiritual aspect changed justice from a tool of force to a way to bring about transformation. Buddhism expanded on this idea with the ideas of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Karuna (compassion). The Dhammapada says, "Hatred is never stopped by hatred; only through non-hatred is hatred stopped."<sup>191</sup> The Vinaya Pitaka formalised these ideas by establishing conciliatory practices, such as samatha (pacification) and patisaraniya-kamma (acts of reconciliation).<sup>192</sup> In this framework, resolving disputes became a type of meditation that led to moral enlightenment. The perpetrator was not exiled but reintegrated into the moral community through remorse and absolution.

Anekantavada (many-sidedness) and Syadvada (the principle of conditional predication) in Jainism provided a profound moral foundation for reconciliation. These philosophies recognised that truth is complex and partial, and that moral arrogance fosters conflict.<sup>193</sup> In Jain law, Kshama (forgiveness) is the most important civic virtue. The Kshamavani Parv, which happens once a year, invites everyone to forgive and ask for forgiveness. This is an example of restorative justice based on spiritual humility.<sup>194</sup> These spiritual methods are closely related to modern concepts of restorative justice. Howard Zehr, known as the "grandfather of restorative justice," asserts that true justice prioritises repairing the harm done

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<sup>188</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 544.

<sup>189</sup> R.C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 35.

<sup>190</sup> Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, Vol. IV, 24–26.

<sup>191</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse 5.

<sup>192</sup> Law, *The Vinaya Pitaka*, 103–105.

<sup>193</sup> Padmanabh Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 83.

<sup>194</sup> Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London: Routledge, 2002), 134.

to relationships over punishment.<sup>195</sup> Long ago, spiritual traditions in India recognised this. Justice was a moral duty in rural panchayats to settle family conflicts and in Buddhist sanghas to help wayward monks return to the path, bringing peace to both the community and the individual. On the other hand, modern legal systems, which originated from colonial times, often prioritise uniformity over compassion. The British adversarial legal system turned law into a game, linking winning with being morally right.<sup>196</sup> Amartya Sen contends in *The Idea of Justice* that the Indian notion of *nyaya* does not equate justice with perfect institutions. It only sees *niti* (laws and institutions) as applicable when they help *nyaya*, which is the real experience of justice.<sup>197</sup> This distinction is crucial for any meaningful legal reform in India. A dharmic system assesses justice by its outcomes, rather than its processes, specifically the degree to which social harmony is restored and human dignity is maintained.

In Indian spiritual jurisprudence, punishment was deemed significant only when it promoted self-realisation. People saw the person who committed the deed as someone who was temporarily blinded by ignorance (*avidya*) rather than as someone who consistently breaks the law. As a result, community work, acts of repentance (*prayaschitta*), and clemency were preferred to imprisonment or the death penalty.<sup>198</sup> The emphasis was continuously on *samskara*—the development of consciousness—rather than on retribution. In today's world, the spiritual side of justice is the most important. The current Indian judiciary increasingly recognises restorative approaches in cases involving minors, familial disputes, and environmental justice. The Delhi High Court said in *Rajendra Kumar v. State* (2010), "Justice is best served not just by punishment but also by making things right and bringing people back together."<sup>199</sup> These judgments embody the timeless tenets of Indian philosophy, which posits that justice, similar to compassion, ought to heal rather than harm the human heart.

### **Modern Law and the Revival of Pluralism**

The British codified Indian law in the 19th century to achieve greater consistency by eliminating what they perceived as the "confusion" of having more than one legal system. Sir Henry Maine famously said that Indian culture was "a domain of status, rather than of contract."<sup>200</sup> He did not understand that the variety, which came from moral society and spiritual principles, was the basis of India's respected legal system. The colonial imposition of the rule of law severed legal principles

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<sup>195</sup> Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: Restorative Justice for Our Times* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2015), 47.

<sup>196</sup> N. A. Palkhivala, *We the People* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1994), 92.

<sup>197</sup> Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 20–23.

<sup>198</sup> Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, 316–318.

<sup>199</sup> *Rajendra Kumar v. State*, 2010 SCC OnLine Del 4532.

<sup>200</sup> Henry Maine, *Ancient Law* (London: John Murray, 1861), 178.

from their cultural context, replacing them with mechanical legality. After gaining independence, India adopted this system, and constitutionalism was used to help people coexist. The people who wrote the Constitution had a deep understanding of what made India's culture so great. The Preamble's ideas of justice, freedom, equality, and brotherhood are similar to the traditional four: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. These three reflect a balance of moral order, material wealth, and social unity.<sup>201</sup> Dr B.R. Ambedkar warned against simple traditionalism, saying that dharma is the moral basis of social democracy.<sup>202</sup> Post-colonialism saw the resurgence of the concept of legal plurality as a response to the alienation caused by centralised law. Scholars such as Werner Menski and Marc Galanter assert that India operates under a "triangular model" of law, which encompasses state law, social law, and natural law.<sup>203</sup> This idea suggests that formal courts operate in conjunction with religious beliefs and informal societal norms. The Panchayati Raj reforms, Lok Adalats, and Gram Nyayalayas are examples of this return to pluralism.<sup>204</sup>

India's restorative traditions serve as the foundation for the Lok Adalat program, established under the Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987. It aims to resolve problems quickly and peacefully through conciliation, which is based on the principles of samadhan (settlement) and sahabhagita (participation).<sup>205</sup> Unlike adversarial trials, Lok Adalats focus on agreement and remorse, like the old panchayat system. The statistics are clear: millions of situations, including marital disagreements and minor criminal matters, have been resolved through conversation rather than going to Court.<sup>206</sup>

The simultaneous revival of nyaya panchayats at the community level illustrates the resilience of conventional judicial systems. Local councils still settle disputes in several states, including Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. This is especially true when social ties are more important than legal procedures.<sup>207</sup> These forums have problems, but they do offer variety, accessibility, and moral validity, which are not often present in traditional courts. The legal recognition of cultural and spiritual freedoms is a crucial aspect of modern diversity. The Supreme Court of India ruled in *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994) that secularism is an important part of the Constitution's basic framework. It defined secularism not as irreligion but as sarva dharma sambhava, which means equal respect for all

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<sup>201</sup> Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 43.

<sup>202</sup> B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (Bombay: Navayana, 1936).

<sup>203</sup> Werner Menski, *Comparative Law in a Global Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233.

<sup>204</sup> Ministry of Law and Justice, *Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008*.

<sup>205</sup> Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, Section 19.

<sup>206</sup> National Legal Services Authority, *Lok Adalat Data Report, 2023*.

<sup>207</sup> Government of India, *Report on Panchayati Raj and Justice Delivery*, NIRDPR, 2018.

religions.<sup>208</sup> The Court ruled in *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986) that Jehovah's Witness children had the freedom not to sing the national anthem due to their religious beliefs. This affirmed the idea of spiritual autonomy for each person.<sup>209</sup> These decisions show how modern law can combine spirituality and constitutionalism when viewed through the prism of Indian culture. The Supreme Court's environmental jurisprudence is an excellent example of this mix. In *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India* (1996), the Court determined that the conventional notion of prakriti dharma, which signifies the duty to protect nature, represents an essential component of fundamental rights.<sup>210</sup> In the case of *MC Mehta v. Kamal Nath* (1997), the court applied the public trust doctrine to protect the environment. This combined modern legal notions with the ancient concept of lokasangraha, which emphasises the well-being of all living things.<sup>211</sup> These examples illustrate that Indian law functions as a bridge between modern rights and lasting duties when viewed through the lens of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

However, there are still problems. The pluralist model must safeguard against exploitation by regressive or patriarchal norms. The way forward is summed up by legal professor Baxi's conception of "transformative pluralism," which combines respect for tradition with following constitutional principles.<sup>212</sup> The spiritual core of IKS, which stresses compassion, equality, and dignity, provides the moral compass for this change. The future legal revolution in India depends on remembering its old wisdom: justice is a change, not a deal. The combination of dharma and democracy, as well as spirituality and legality, makes modern regulations more humane while retaining their universal nature. The revival of Indian legal diversity is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a civilisational necessity, aimed at harmonising the law's text with the fundamental principles of justice.

## Conclusion

The legal framework in India did not evolve in isolation; it originated from the cultural milieu that nurtured the Upanishads, shaped Kabir's poetry, and guided the deliberations of the panchayat. The Indian Knowledge System views justice not merely as a judgment of rights and wrongs, but as the harmonious interaction between human conduct and cosmic order. In today's world, where the law often involves paperwork and punishment, this timeless truth reminds us that justice should be flexible, understanding, and focused on rehabilitation. The Indian legal trajectory exhibits substantial continuity. The primary objective has always been

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<sup>208</sup> *S. R. Bommai v. Union of India*, (1994) 3 SCC 1.

<sup>209</sup> *Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala*, (1986) 3 SCC 615.

<sup>210</sup> *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India*, (1996) 9 SCC 632.

<sup>211</sup> *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*, (1997) 1 SCC 388

<sup>212</sup> Upendra Baxi, "Transformative Constitutionalism and the Indian Experience," *South African Journal on Human Rights* 28, no. 2 (2012): 180–198.

to uphold dignity (maryada), fairness (samata), and kindness (karuna), from the dharmasāstra to the Constitution, and from the nyaya sabha to the lok adalat. The spiritual essence of Indian law posits that truth is not merely a concept to be validated but an experience to be undergone. Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, "It is better to do your own dharma poorly than to do someone else's well." <sup>11</sup> This means that, according to the law, justice should come from the people's moral values, not from an outside ideal. India is currently at a critical juncture in its history. Our courts are too busy, our laws are becoming increasingly complex, and we do not trust the system to work effectively. The solution lies not in further codification but in a redefinition of ethics. Reinstating the dharmic paradigm of law establishes a framework wherein legal plurality, community involvement, and spiritual ethics collectively promote societal healing. To bring this back to life, it is essential to incorporate restorative techniques into the formal judiciary, enhance Gram Nyayalayas, and integrate ethics lessons into legal courses. Indian law should be based on conversation and understanding, not rules and force. It is worth noting that the first judge in India was a rishi, not a magistrate, and the first courtroom was not a colonial building, but rather a circle under a banyan tree. When spirituality influences the law, it shifts from being a tool of oppression to a source of guidance and support. The true legacy of the Indian Knowledge System is not a longing for the past, but rather confidence in its enduring essence. If India combines modern constitutionalism with the moral principles of dharma, it could create a legal system that is both spiritually sound and effective globally. The agreement that used to guide the sabhas and sanghas must now guide our judges and lawmakers. When it happens, justice in India will no longer be delayed; it will be served.

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## Brief Profile of Author

*Mr. Rishi Bhargava is an Assistant Professor of Law at NMIMS, Indore Campus. He has over 3 years of industrial and 4 years of academic experience in legal education and research with a specialization in constitutional law, jurisprudence, and law-and-society studies. His research interests intersect the domains of law, spirituality, and the Indian Knowledge System, with a focus on restorative justice and legal pluralism. Mr. Bhargava has presented papers at several national and international conferences and has been actively involved in faculty development initiatives. His teaching philosophy emphasizes the integration of ethical reasoning and spiritual values into legal education, in line with India’s civilizational vision of law as an instrument of social harmony and collective well-being.*

**Mob:** +91-8109740732

**E-mail:** rishibhargava.research@gmail.com

## Indian Knowledge System & IPR: Traditional Knowledge

**Prof. Dr. Deevanshu Shrivastava,**

*Founding Dean and Professor of Law,*

*GL Bajaj Institute of Law, Greater Noida, India.*

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### **Abstract**

*Traditional knowledge in India represents one of the world's oldest and most sophisticated reservoirs of intellectual and cultural heritage. Embedded within the broader Indian Knowledge System, it encompasses codified classical traditions, community-based ecological knowledge, medicinal practices, agricultural innovations, crafts, and a wide range of oral and embodied forms of expertise. Despite this depth and diversity, modern intellectual property rights regimes remain poorly equipped to recognize or protect traditional knowledge. Their emphasis on individual authorship, novelty, exclusivity, and written documentation stands in stark contrast to the collective, cumulative, relational, and orally transmitted character of traditional knowledge in India. This chapter offers an extensive examination of these structural tensions, beginning with a detailed analysis of the epistemological foundations of Indian knowledge, including the *pramāṇa* framework, holistic reasoning, and embodied practice. It then explores how these foundations clash with the reductionist and documentation-dependent structures of contemporary IPR systems. The chapter examines India's experiences with biopiracy, including landmark disputes involving turmeric, neem, and basmati rice, and reveals the epistemic and institutional biases that enable such misappropriation. It evaluates India's legal and policy responses, including the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, the Biological Diversity Act, People's Biodiversity Registers, and Geographical Indications, while highlighting the persisting gaps and challenges. Finally, the chapter situates India's struggle within global debates on traditional knowledge protection, arguing for the development of *sui generis* frameworks that align with the cultural, ethical, and ecological dimensions of traditional knowledge. In doing so, it presents a comprehensive foundation for rethinking the governance of traditional knowledge in India within both national and international legal contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge System; Traditional Knowledge; Intellectual Property Rights; Biopiracy; Epistemology.*

## 1. Introduction

The intellectual and cultural landscape of the Indian subcontinent is shaped by a profound legacy of knowledge systems that have evolved through centuries of philosophical speculation, practical experimentation, community-based innovation, and ecological adaptation. This intricate and layered heritage is today referred to as the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Though the term itself is modern, the underlying framework reflects a civilizational continuum extending back thousands of years. Far from being a static archive, IKS represents an ongoing epistemic tradition grounded in lived experience, intergenerational memory, and the sophisticated intellectual practices of diverse communities across the region.<sup>213</sup> In recent decades, global economic and technological shifts have drawn intense attention to traditional knowledge (TK). The modern pharmaceutical, agritech, biotechnology, nutraceutical, cosmetic, and wellness industries increasingly rely on natural resources and knowledge systems originating in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania.<sup>214</sup> India, with its extraordinary diversity of flora, fauna, cultures, and indigenous knowledge traditions, has become a focal point in international debates about the governance of TK. As economic incentives rise, so do concerns about misappropriation, biopiracy, and the inequitable extraction of knowledge from communities that have historically nurtured and sustained it.

These concerns are fundamentally rooted in the inadequacies of modern **Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)** systems. IPR frameworks shaped by European legal traditions, Enlightenment epistemologies, and capitalist market logics rest on assumptions of individual authorship, novelty, originality, and exclusive ownership.<sup>215</sup> TK, by contrast, is typically collective, cumulative, and transmitted orally through social memory and cultural practice. Its epistemic foundations are holistic rather than reductionist, relational rather than mechanistic, and embedded within ecological and spiritual frameworks rather than isolated from them. This fundamental epistemic divergence creates significant challenges for the legal recognition and protection of TK.

India's experiences with major biopiracy cases involving turmeric, neem, and basmati rice revealed structural vulnerabilities within the global IPR system and demonstrated how inadequacies in prior art recognition may lead to illegitimate patents being granted for knowledge long known to local communities.<sup>216</sup> These disputes exposed the epistemic biases embedded in patent examinations, which

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<sup>213</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Purushottama Bilimoria, eds., *Indian Knowledge Systems, Vol. 1: Nature of Knowledge* (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2010), 3–5.

<sup>214</sup> Graham Dutfield, *Intellectual Property, Biogenetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 21–25.

<sup>215</sup> Madhavi Sunder, *From Goods to a Good Life: Intellectual Property and Global Justice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 64–70

<sup>216</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 28–44.

privilege written scientific documentation over centuries of orally transmitted or culturally embedded knowledge. In response, India undertook significant institutional efforts, most notably the creation of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), designed to proactively prevent the misappropriation of codified systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and yoga.<sup>217</sup>

Yet these efforts, though important, do not fully resolve the deeper tensions between IKS and IPR.<sup>218</sup> This chapter provides an in-depth examination of these tensions, offering both a theoretical and a practical understanding of the interface between IKS and modern intellectual property law. It explores the nature and epistemology of Indian knowledge systems, the sociocultural foundations of TK, the limitations of IPR frameworks, historical cases of biopiracy, India's legal responses, and the broader international landscape. Through this analysis, the chapter argues that any meaningful protection of TK requires a paradigm shift in legal thinking—one that recognizes the distinctiveness of indigenous and traditional epistemologies and resists the uncritical imposition of Western legal categories on non-Western knowledge systems.

The chapter unfolds in several stages. First, it outlines the philosophical, historical, and cultural foundations of the Indian Knowledge System, examining how knowledge is conceived, transmitted, preserved, and validated in Indian traditions. Second, it explores the epistemological underpinnings of TK and outlines the ways in which modern IPR regimes fail to capture its complexity. Third, it examines India's experience with biopiracy and evaluates the country's legal and institutional responses. Fourth, it situates India within the broader international debates around TK protection, evaluating proposals for sui generis legal frameworks.<sup>219</sup> Finally, it argues for a more nuanced, culturally grounded, and ethically attentive approach to the governance of traditional knowledge.

## **2. The Indian Knowledge System: Intellectual, Historical, and Cultural Foundations**

The Indian Knowledge System encompasses a constellation of intellectual practices that span philosophy, medicine, ecology, agriculture, architecture, linguistics, mathematics, aesthetics, and spirituality. To understand the challenges of TK protection, it is essential to comprehend the structure, diversity, and epistemic orientation of IKS.

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<sup>217</sup> V.K. Gupta, "Protecting India's Traditional Knowledge," *World Patent Information* 30, no. 3 (2008): 208–12.

<sup>218</sup> B.K. Matilal, *The Word and the World: India's Contribution to the Study of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 102–8.

<sup>219</sup> World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), *The Protection of Traditional Knowledge: Draft Articles* (Geneva: WIPO, 2019).

## 2.1 Holistic Conceptions of Knowledge

One of the defining features of Indian knowledge traditions is their holistic and integrative character. Unlike modern Western knowledge systems, which increasingly rely on specialization and disciplinary fragmentation, classical Indian thought tends to view knowledge as an interconnected whole. Philosophy, science, ethics, and art inform one another.<sup>220</sup> This unity is evident in classical Sanskrit treatises such as the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, which integrates medical theory with metaphysical concepts of the body, mind, and cosmos, or in architectural texts like the *Mānasāra*, which link temple design to cosmological geometry.<sup>221</sup>

This integrative character of IKS also manifests in the way it embeds scientific knowledge within moral, ethical, and spiritual frameworks. For example, the concept of *ṛta* (cosmic order) underpins both Vedic cosmology and traditional ecological practices, while the principle of *dharma* (ethical duty) shapes not only individual conduct but also community responsibilities toward nature. Unlike the Western scientific tradition, which often separates empirical inquiry from ethical or metaphysical concerns, IKS perceives these dimensions as interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

## 2.2 Knowledge as Practice and Experience

A substantial portion of the Indian Knowledge System is preserved not in texts but in practice. Tribal healers, pastoralists, farmers, artisans, midwives, fishers, and seasonal foragers possess knowledge that is accumulated through lived experience, environmental interaction, and collective memory.<sup>222</sup> This knowledge is deeply embedded in the rhythms of daily life, encoded in stories, rituals, songs, gestures, and customary norms.

Take, for example, agricultural knowledge. In many parts of India, farmers employ multi-cropping, seed selection, composting, and water-harvesting techniques that have been refined over centuries<sup>223</sup>. These practices are shaped by intimate knowledge of local soils, monsoon patterns, microclimates, and biodiversity. Similarly, tribal medical traditions involve precise identification of plant species,

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<sup>220</sup> Kapil Kapoor, *Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12–18.

<sup>221</sup> Dominik Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 4–9; Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 45–52.

<sup>222</sup> Arun Agrawal, “Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge,” *Development and Change* 26, no. 3 (1995): 413–39.

<sup>223</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989), 105–12.

ecological indicators, harvesting rituals, and preparation methods that are transmitted orally from one generation to another.<sup>224</sup>

Such knowledge systems are not merely empirical but also relational. They connect communities to their landscapes and are often governed by customary norms designed to ensure ecological sustainability. They also resist easy codification because they rely on tacit knowledge that cannot be fully articulated in text or formula.<sup>225</sup>

### **2.3 Community Ownership and Social Legitimacy**

Traditional knowledge is rarely the product of an identifiable individual. It accrues over generations through shared experimentation and collective refinement. Its ownership is therefore communal, and its legitimacy derives from social processes, lineage, reputation, experience, and community recognition rather than formal authorship.<sup>226</sup> This collective character is central to understanding why TK does not align well with IPR frameworks. Modern IP law hinges on exclusive rights vested in identifiable inventors or authors. These rights are justified by the assumption that innovation arises from individual creativity and that exclusive rights incentivize further innovation. TK disrupts these assumptions because its origins are diffuse, its holders communal, and its innovations incremental rather than sudden.<sup>227</sup>

### **2.4 Ecological Embeddedness and Environmental Stewardship**

India's ecological diversity—from the Himalayan forests to the Western Ghats, the Thar desert, and coastal ecosystems—has shaped an equally diverse array of knowledge systems. Communities living in these environments have developed highly specialized knowledge adapted to local conditions: herbal remedies suited to alpine climates, drought-resistant cropping systems in arid regions, fish migration patterns understood by coastal communities, and forest stewardship practices followed by tribal groups.<sup>228</sup> These systems embody a relational worldview in which humans are embedded within, not separate from, ecological systems. The stewardship practices that arise from this worldview are often incompatible with the commercial exploitation encouraged by global IPR frameworks.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> S. Udaykumar, "Traditional Medicinal Knowledge among Indigenous Communities of India," *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* 12, no. 1 (2013): 139–50.

<sup>225</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 4–7.

<sup>226</sup> Darrell A. Posey, *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 1999), 28–33.

<sup>227</sup> Shubha Ghosh, "Globalization, Patents, and Traditional Knowledge," *Columbia Journal of Asian Law* 17, no. 1 (2003): 73–76.

<sup>228</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 82–101.

<sup>229</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 54–60.

### 3. Epistemological Foundations of Indian Knowledge and the Limitations of Modern IPR

The epistemological foundations of the Indian Knowledge System are substantially different from those that underlie modern scientific and legal frameworks. These differences are not incidental. They shape the way knowledge is produced, validated, transmitted, and socially authorized. They also lead to profound tensions when contemporary intellectual property regimes attempt to categorize or protect knowledge that was developed within an entirely different set of philosophical assumptions. Understanding these epistemological foundations is therefore essential to grasping the incompatibilities between traditional knowledge and modern IPR systems.

#### 3.1 The Pramana Framework and Epistemic Pluralism

Classical Indian philosophical traditions articulate a rich and complex theory of knowledge through the concept of pramana. Schools such as Nyaya, Mimamsa, Vedanta, and Ayurveda identify multiple valid means of knowing. These include perception, inference, comparison, verbal testimony, postulation, and non-apprehension.<sup>230</sup> This framework reflects an epistemic pluralism that differs markedly from the more stringent empiricism generally associated with Western scientific traditions.

Perception, or *pratyaksha*, involves direct sensory experience, which remains central to both Indian and Western epistemologies. Traditionally trained healers rely on sensory cues, including smell, texture, color, bodily heat, and pulse variations, to diagnose illness. These forms of perception, grounded in embodied practice rather than instrumentation, form a critical part of Ayurveda and Siddha medical systems.<sup>231</sup> Inference, or *anumana*, expands upon perception by allowing practitioners to reason from observed signs to underlying causes. Oral medical traditions make substantial use of inference, drawing broader conclusions about bodily states or ecological patterns from specific observations.<sup>232</sup>

Another crucial pramana is *shabda*, authoritative testimony, typically derived from texts or teachers. In the Indian context, *shabda* reflects the intergenerational trust placed in lineages of practitioners whose knowledge accumulates through centuries of empirical engagement. The authority of a text, such as the *Charaka Samhita* or the *Sushruta Samhita*, does not derive only from authorship but from the continuous validation of its contents through practice.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Karl H. Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Vol. II—Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 85–102.

<sup>231</sup> Dominik Wujastyk, “The Ayurvedic Anatomical Body,” in *Body, Breath, and Consciousness in Yoga* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 52–58.

<sup>232</sup> G. Jan Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, vol. 1A (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1999), 112–18.

<sup>233</sup> P.V. Sharma, *Caraka-Samhitā: Text with English Translation*, vol. 1 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1981), xxiv–xxviii.

In contrast, modern intellectual property regimes generally recognize written scientific documentation and reproducible experimentation as primary sources of legitimacy. The Patent Office relies on written prior art and laboratory-based evidence. Oral knowledge, practical routines, or lineage-based testimonies rarely qualify as evidence of existing knowledge unless explicitly documented in recognized formats.<sup>234</sup> This evidentiary hierarchy marginalizes enormous bodies of traditional knowledge that remain orally transmitted, functionally validated, but undocumented in formal scientific literature.

### 3.2 Holistic Reasoning and Systemic Knowledge

Another core feature of Indian epistemology is its systemic and holistic approach to knowledge. Traditional medicine, agriculture, and ecology in India operate on the premise that natural and human systems are interconnected. Ayurveda does not isolate diseases in terms of discrete pathogens but considers imbalances among doshas that manifest through diet, environment, seasonal changes, mental states, and lifestyle. Tribal ecological knowledge interprets forests, soils, animals, insects, and weather as interrelated components of a single ecological system.<sup>235</sup>

Modern IPR frameworks, and especially patent law, rest on principles that favor reductionism. Patent claims must identify a specific technical problem, articulate the inventive step, and differentiate the invention from existing knowledge.<sup>236</sup> The holistic nature of TK does not easily lend itself to such reduction. When a traditional herbal formulation contains several ingredients that work synergistically, patent examiners may require applicants to isolate the compound or identify a specific active ingredient. This requirement distorts the holistic logic of traditional systems, which emphasize relational properties and balance rather than isolated biochemical effects.<sup>237</sup> Holism also raises questions about the ownership of knowledge components. If traditional medicine integrates dozens of ingredients, each with cultural, ecological, and ritual significance, assigning exclusive rights to one isolated component seems analytically and ethically problematic. It fragments what is meant to function as a unified system.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite, *Information Feudalism: Who Owns the Knowledge Economy?* (London: Earthscan, 2002), 46–49.

<sup>235</sup> Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei, *The Ecology of Law: Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2015), 92–101.

<sup>236</sup> Peter Drahos, *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1996), 76–82.

<sup>237</sup> A.B. Dandekar and B.G. Sorokhaibam, “Traditional Herbal Medicine and Synergy: Implications for Patents,” *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 197 (2017): 1–9.

<sup>238</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights: A Handbook* (New Delhi: Research Foundation for Science, Technology & Ecology, 2001), 44–48.

### 3.3 Tacit, Embodied, and Context-Specific Knowledge

A significant portion of traditional knowledge is tacit or embodied. It cannot be fully articulated in words or symbols, but must be learned through apprenticeship, repetition, and lived engagement. The knowledge of a master weaver includes the exact amount of tension to apply on a loom, the subtle variations in yarn quality that can only be sensed through touch, and the hand movements required to create particular designs.<sup>239</sup> Likewise, the knowledge of a tribal healer includes sensory cues for identifying medicinal plants, ecological knowledge of where and when such plants grow, and tacit awareness of dosage and preparation techniques.<sup>240</sup>

Modern intellectual property law requires written documentation that meets strict standards of clarity and reproducibility. Patent specifications must describe the invention in sufficient detail to allow a person skilled in the art to replicate it. Embodied knowledge that resists codification cannot meet this requirement.<sup>241</sup> As a result, the knowledge held by traditional artisans, healers, and farmers cannot be patented by them, even though external actors may convert parts of this knowledge into documentable forms and then claim proprietary rights.<sup>242</sup> This raises fundamental questions about justice, power, and epistemic bias within IP systems.

### 3.4 The Problem of Oral Transmission and Prior Art

The oral transmission of TK raises specific challenges for prior art recognition in patent systems. Patent examiners generally rely on scientific journals, patent databases, and documented literature to determine whether a claimed invention is novel. If knowledge has been widely known and used within a community for centuries but is not recorded in these formal sources, it may be treated as novel.<sup>243</sup> This problem was dramatically illustrated in the turmeric patent case, where the USPTO granted a patent for the use of turmeric, widely known in India, simply because Western examiners could not locate written documentation accessible to them.<sup>244</sup> Oral knowledge also poses risks of misinterpretation. When external researchers document TK, the documentation process often strips the knowledge of its cultural context and embeds it within Western scientific categories. This epistemic translation may distort the knowledge and leave communities without control over how their knowledge is represented or used.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 4–10.

<sup>240</sup> Fikret Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 100–110.

<sup>241</sup> Robert P. Merges and Seagull Haiyan Song, *Transnational Intellectual Property Law* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018), 132–35.

<sup>242</sup> Graham Dutfield, *Intellectual Property Rights and the Life Science Industries* (London: Routledge, 2009), 184–88.

<sup>243</sup> Anil K. Gupta, “Rewarding Local Knowledge and Innovation: The Honey Bee Network,” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 3, no. 3 (2002): 275–76.

<sup>244</sup> R.A. Mashelkar, “India’s Experience with Prior Art and the Turmeric Patent Case,” *Current Science* 86, no. 6 (2004): 754–55.

<sup>245</sup> Arun Agrawal, “Dismantling the Divide Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge,” *Development and Change* 26, no. 3 (1995): 422–25.

### 3.5 Ethical, Spiritual, and Cultural Dimensions

Many traditional practices in India are embedded in ethical and spiritual frameworks. Medicinal plants may be considered sacred. The harvesting of certain species may be governed by ritual protocols designed to maintain ecological balance. Traditional crafts may carry ancestral significance that goes beyond their functional utility.<sup>246</sup> Intellectual property law, built on the assumption that knowledge is a commodity, cannot accommodate these non-utilitarian dimensions. Consequently, even when communities do not object to the use of their knowledge, they may oppose its commodification or its separation from cultural rituals that give it meaning.<sup>247</sup> These ethical and cultural dimensions highlight the limitations of applying economic frameworks to knowledge systems that are not based on individual ownership or commercial incentives.

They underscore the need to conceive TK protection not merely as a legal issue but as a cultural and moral imperative.<sup>248</sup>

## 4. Biopiracy and Misappropriation in India: A Detailed Examination

India's encounters with biopiracy have profoundly shaped the global conversation on traditional knowledge protection. These cases illuminate the structural vulnerabilities in IPR regimes, the power imbalances between multinational corporations and indigenous communities, and the inadequacies of legal mechanisms designed to recognize and protect non-Western knowledge systems.

### 4.1 The Turmeric Case: Epistemic Bias in Patent Systems

In 1995, USPTO granted Patent No. 5401504 to the University of Mississippi Medical Center for the use of turmeric powder in wound healing<sup>249</sup>. The applicants claimed novelty because this use had not been documented in scientific literature accessible to them.<sup>250</sup> This instance drew immediate criticism from Indian scholars and policymakers, as the use of turmeric for wound healing is deeply rooted in Indian household practices and classical Ayurvedic literature. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research challenged the patent by presenting textual evidence from ancient Sanskrit texts and medical treatises, demonstrating longstanding knowledge of turmeric's healing properties<sup>251</sup>. USPTO ultimately

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<sup>246</sup> Darrell A. Posey, *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* (Nairobi: UNEP, 1999), 45–52.

<sup>247</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 63–67.

<sup>248</sup> Madhavi Sunder, *From Goods to a Good Life: Intellectual Property and Global Justice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 84–87.

<sup>249</sup> R.A. Mashelkar, "India's Experience with Prior Art and the Turmeric Patent Case," *Current Science* 86, no. 6 (2004): 754.

<sup>250</sup> nil K. Gupta, "Rewarding Traditional Knowledge and Prior Art: The Turmeric Case," *Honey Bee* 8, no. 1 (1997): 3–5.

<sup>251</sup> V.K. Gupta, "Protecting India's Traditional Knowledge," *World Patent Information* 30, no. 3 (2008): 208–10.

revoked the patent in 1997<sup>252</sup>. This case exposed epistemic biases embedded in patent examinations, particularly the privileging of Western scientific documentation over traditional or non-Western sources of knowledge. It also revealed the problematic assumption that knowledge lacking scientific documentation is necessarily novel.<sup>253</sup>

#### **4.2 The Neem Case: Corporate Appropriation of Community Knowledge**

The neem case remains one of the most emblematic examples of biopiracy. W R Grace, an American corporation, along with the United States Department of Agriculture, obtained a European patent for a neem-based fungicidal product<sup>254</sup>. Indian farmers had long used neem oil, leaves, and extracts for pesticidal purposes, and these uses were documented in classical texts and widely practiced in agriculture.<sup>255</sup> Indian activists, farmers' groups, and NGOs mobilized a coalition that challenged the patent at the European Patent Office.<sup>256</sup> After extensive litigation, the patent was revoked in 2000.<sup>257</sup> The neem case demonstrated how corporations can appropriate traditional ecological knowledge by isolating specific components and presenting them as novel inventions.<sup>258</sup> It also illustrated the power asymmetry between indigenous communities and multinational corporations, and the challenges communities face when defending their knowledge in foreign legal jurisdictions.<sup>259</sup>

#### **4.3 The Basmati Rice Case: Commodification of Cultural and Agricultural Heritage**

In 1997, RiceTec Inc., a United States-based company, obtained a patent for certain lines and grain characteristics of basmati rice.<sup>260</sup> The patent was widely criticized in India, where basmati is considered part of the country's cultural and

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<sup>252</sup> United States Patent and Trademark Office, "Reexamination Certificate for Patent No. 5401504," USPTO Records, 1997.

<sup>253</sup> Peter Drahos, *A Philosophy of Intellectual Property* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1996), 112–15.

<sup>254</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 37–42.

<sup>255</sup> P.K. Warriar, V.P.K. Warriar, and C.K. Nambiar, *Indian Medicinal Plants: A Compendium of 500 Species*, vol. 4 (Kottakkal: Arya Vaidya Sala, 1996), 15–18.

<sup>256</sup> G. Dutfield, *Intellectual Property, Biogenetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 70–73.

<sup>257</sup> European Patent Office, "Decision on Opposition to European Patent No. 436257 (Neem Case)," EPO Proceedings, 2000.

<sup>258</sup> Sarah A. Laird and Rachel Wynberg, "Bioprospecting, Access, and Benefit Sharing: Revisiting the Neem Case," *Journal of Environment & Development* 17, no. 1 (2008): 26–29.

<sup>259</sup> Shubha Ghosh, "Traditional Knowledge, Patents, and the Public Domain," in *Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge*, ed. Daniel F. Robinson (London: Routledge, 2010), 55–58.

<sup>260</sup> Devinder Sharma, "Basmati: The Battle for Control," *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 26 (1998): 1614–16.

agricultural heritage.<sup>261</sup> Indian authorities argued that the patent appropriated traditional rice varieties and misrepresented them as proprietary inventions.<sup>262</sup> Global advocacy and diplomatic pressure eventually led RiceTec to withdraw several claims.<sup>263</sup> The case raised important questions about geographical identity, cultural heritage, and the commodification of plant varieties that evolved through centuries of community-based agricultural innovation.<sup>264</sup> It also demonstrated that traditional agricultural knowledge can be vulnerable to misappropriation when incorporated into proprietary breeding programs.<sup>265</sup>

#### **4.4 Beyond the Famous Cases: Everyday Biopiracy**

While the turmeric, neem, and basmati cases received international attention, countless instances of biopiracy remain undocumented.<sup>266</sup> Researchers, corporations, and private individuals routinely collect plant samples, document medicinal uses, or study agricultural practices without obtaining prior informed consent from communities or offering benefit sharing.<sup>267</sup> These practices reveal structural problems in global research ethics and international law.<sup>268</sup> The lack of enforceable international frameworks for TK protection exacerbates these vulnerabilities.<sup>269</sup>

### **5. India's Legal and Institutional Responses**

#### **5.1 Traditional Knowledge Digital Library**

India's most significant institutional innovation in the protection of traditional knowledge is the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library. TKDL was conceived as a proactive measure to prevent the misappropriation of codified systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and yoga.<sup>270</sup> The database translates textual knowledge into several languages and formats accessible to patent examiners in major

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<sup>261</sup> Suman Sahai, "The Basmati Patent: A Case of Biopiracy," *Gene Campaign Briefing Paper* (New Delhi: Gene Campaign, 1998), 2–4.

<sup>262</sup> Graham Dutfield, *Intellectual Property, Biogenetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge* (London: Earthscan, 2004), 73–75.

<sup>263</sup> United States Patent and Trademark Office, "Amended Claims in U.S. Patent No. 5663484 (RiceTec Basmati Patent)," USPTO Records, 2001.

<sup>264</sup> Ashok Gulati and Sudha Narayanan, *The Basmati Rice Economy: Issues and Policy Options* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41–44.

<sup>265</sup> Jack Kloppenburg, *First the Seed: The Political Economy of Plant Biotechnology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 149–54.

<sup>266</sup> Sarah A. Laird, *Biodiversity and Traditional Knowledge: Equitable Partnerships in Practice* (London: Earthscan, 2002), 14–17.

<sup>267</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity, "Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits," Secretariat of the CBD (2011), 6–8.

<sup>268</sup> Daniel F. Robinson, *Confronting Biopiracy: Global Case Studies in Biodiversity Politics* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 22–28.

<sup>269</sup> World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), *The Protection of Traditional Knowledge: Draft Articles* (Geneva: WIPO, 2019), 3–5.

<sup>270</sup> Ministry of AYUSH, *Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: Overview and Context* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2015), 4–6.

jurisdictions.<sup>271</sup> The emergence of TKDL reflects a shift in Indian strategy from reactive litigation to proactive defense. TKDL challenges the epistemic bias embedded within global patent systems by entering traditional knowledge into searchable databases that meet the evidentiary standards of patent offices.<sup>272</sup> It thereby alters the landscape of prior art recognition. Nevertheless, the TKDL model primarily protects codified knowledge. It does not address orally transmitted knowledge or the knowledge of tribal communities that remains undocumented.

## 5.2 Biological Diversity Act and Access and Benefit Sharing

The Biological Diversity Act, enacted in 2002, implements India's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity.<sup>273</sup> It regulates access to biological resources and associated knowledge. The Act requires prior approval for accessing biological resources for research or commercial use and mandates equitable benefit sharing.<sup>274</sup> It also establishes a decentralized governance structure consisting of the National Biodiversity Authority, State Biodiversity Boards, and local Biodiversity Management Committees.

The creation of People's Biodiversity Registers represents an important attempt to document community knowledge. These registers provide a mechanism for communities to assert their rights over local resources.<sup>275</sup> However, challenges persist. Documentation may risk exposing knowledge that communities consider sensitive. Bureaucratic processes sometimes overshadow community control. Moreover, documentation alone does not guarantee benefit sharing or prevent misappropriation.<sup>276</sup>

## 5.3 Geographical Indications

India's Geographical Indications regime protects products whose characteristics are linked to a specific region.<sup>277</sup> This form of collective intellectual property aligns more closely with the communal nature of traditional knowledge. Products such as Darjeeling tea, Banarasi silk, and Aranmula metal mirrors receive protection based

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<sup>271</sup> Anuradha Gupta and Nisha Singh, "TKDL and the Global Patent System," *Journal of Intellectual Property Rights* 15, no. 2 (2010): 123–28.

<sup>272</sup> Rajashekharan Pillai, "Traditional Knowledge Digital Library: A Tool to Prevent Misappropriation," *Current Science* 103, no. 7 (2012): 789–92.

<sup>273</sup> Environmental Information System (ENVIS), *The Biological Diversity Act, 2002: A Guide* (New Delhi: Ministry of Environment & Forests, 2003), 3–5.

<sup>274</sup> Convention on Biological Diversity, "Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing," Secretariat of the CBD (2011), 10–12.

<sup>275</sup> Madhav Gadgil, "People's Biodiversity Registers: A Mechanism for Participatory Natural Resource Management," *Current Science* 70, no. 1 (1996): 69–75.

<sup>276</sup> Kanchi Kohli and Shalini Bhutani, *Biodiversity Governance in India: People, Policy and Practice* (New Delhi: Kalpavriksh, 2011), 42–46.

<sup>277</sup> Dev Gangjee, *Relocating the Law of Geographical Indications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 122–25.

on their cultural and geographical specificity.<sup>278</sup> Geographical indications help preserve artisanal heritage and provide economic incentives for communities. However, GI systems do not address the full range of TK, particularly non-commodified knowledge such as medicinal practices or ecological knowledge.<sup>279</sup>

#### 5.4 Customary Law and Community Protocols

Customary laws in many indigenous communities govern the use and transmission of knowledge.<sup>280</sup> Such laws often regulate research access, harvesting practices, and ritual uses of biological resources. In recent years, community protocols have emerged as tools through which communities articulate their customary norms, define conditions for access, and negotiate benefit sharing. These protocols reflect a shift toward community-centered governance.<sup>281</sup> Despite their promise, customary laws and community protocols require stronger legal recognition at national and international levels.

### 6. International Frameworks and Debates on Traditional Knowledge

The international governance of traditional knowledge remains fragmented. The TRIPS Agreement under the World Trade Organization focuses primarily on patents and other forms of intellectual property, but does not explicitly address TK<sup>282</sup>. The Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes sovereign rights over biological resources and mandates fair and equitable benefit sharing, but the absence of binding enforcement mechanisms limits its effectiveness.

WIPO's Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore has debated international frameworks for TK protection for over two decades.<sup>283</sup> While draft texts exist, negotiations remain stalled due to divergent positions between developed and developing countries. Developing countries seek strong, binding protections for TK, while developed countries prioritize flexibility and resist measures that may disrupt existing patent regimes. These legal and diplomatic debates reveal deeper tensions. Traditional knowledge challenges the core assumptions of the global

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<sup>278</sup> Ministry of Commerce and Industry, *Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999: Registered GIs of India* (Government of India, 2020), 15–22.

<sup>279</sup> Michael Blakeney, "Geographical Indications and Traditional Knowledge," *World Intellectual Property Organization Working Paper* (Geneva: WIPO, 2010), 9–12.

<sup>280</sup> Pamela McGrath and Daniel F. Robinson, "Recognising Customary Law: Community-Based Governance of Knowledge and Resources," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 4 (2011): 745–58.

<sup>281</sup> Harry Jonas, Kabir Bavikatte, and Holly Shrumm, "Community Protocols and the Governance of Biodiversity," *Environmental Policy and Law* 40, no. 6 (2010): 337–41.

<sup>282</sup> World Trade Organization, *Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)*, 1994, Articles 27–29.

<sup>283</sup> World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), *Report of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore*, WIPO/GRTKF/IC/43/5 (2022), 2–4.

intellectual property system, which is built on individual ownership and market-based incentives. Indigenous and local communities, however, seek systems that recognize collective ownership, perpetual protection, cultural rights, and ecological relationships.<sup>284</sup>

### **6.1 The Case for Sui Generis Protection**

Given these limitations, many scholars and policymakers argue that TK requires a sui generis legal regime. Such a system would recognize the collective, intergenerational, and culturally embedded nature of TK. It would incorporate customary law, moral rights, perpetual protection, and community consent. Sui generis frameworks can address the limitations of patent-based protection by foregrounding cultural identity, environmental ethics, and community governance.<sup>285</sup> India has contributed significantly to these debates. Its experiences with biopiracy and its institutional innovations serve as models for other countries seeking to protect their TK. However, a fully developed sui generis framework for India remains a future project, requiring extensive consultation with communities, policymakers, and scholars.<sup>286</sup>

## **7. Conclusion**

The Indian Knowledge System embodies a civilizational legacy of enormous depth and importance. It includes sophisticated epistemologies, intricate ecological understandings, refined medical practices, and rich cultural traditions. The collective, intergenerational, holistic, and embodied nature of this knowledge distinguishes it sharply from the assumptions underlying modern intellectual property regimes. Biopiracy cases have demonstrated the vulnerabilities of TK within global IP systems and have spurred India to create innovative mechanisms for its protection. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Effective protection of TK requires legal frameworks that respect its cultural and ecological dimensions. It also requires epistemic humility: an acknowledgment that modern scientific and legal systems do not exhaust the possibilities of human knowledge. As the exploitation of biological and cultural resources intensifies globally, the task of protecting traditional knowledge becomes more urgent. India's experiences offer valuable lessons for constructing equitable and culturally sensitive systems of knowledge governance. Future efforts must aim not only to prevent misappropriation but also to support the flourishing of traditional knowledge systems within their cultural and ecological contexts.

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<sup>284</sup> Madhavi Sunder, *From Goods to a Good Life: Intellectual Property and Global Justice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 94–99.

<sup>285</sup> Daniel F. Robinson, *Confronting Biopiracy: Global Case Studies in Biodiversity Politics* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 181–85.

<sup>286</sup> Shalini Bhutani and Kanchi Kohli, *The Sui Generis Option: Designing a Traditional Knowledge Law for India* (New Delhi: Kalpavriksh, 2003), 22–26.

## Important Books and Readings

- **N.K. Singh (Ed.) (2007).** *Encyclopaedia of Indian Heritage and Culture*. Global Vision Publishing House.  
Offers a foundational understanding of Indian civilizational knowledge frameworks and their epistemic principles, useful for contextualizing IKS historically and philosophically.
- **Kapil Kapoor & Michel Danino (Eds.) (2021).** *Knowledge Traditions and Practices of India*. Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies.  
A major NCERT and MHRD-backed volume that systematically explains IKS across disciplines — philosophy, medicine, ecology, mathematics, and linguistics — and how these contrast with Western paradigms.
- **Darrell A. Posey & Graham Dutfield (1996).** *Beyond Intellectual Property: Toward Traditional Resource Rights for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities*. International Development Research Centre.  
A seminal text exploring how Western IP frameworks marginalize indigenous epistemologies, with globally relevant case studies paralleling India's challenges.
- **Graham Dutfield (2017).** *Intellectual Property, Biogenetic Resources and Traditional Knowledge*. Routledge.  
Critically analyzes international IPR systems, biopiracy, and the need for sui generis frameworks — directly relevant to your paper's legal analysis.
- **B.K. Sinha (2010).** *Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights: A Legal and Ethical Analysis*. Concept Publishing Company.  
Focused on the Indian legal context, this book examines the interface between TK and IP, including the Biological Diversity Act and TKDL initiatives.
- **Vandana Shiva (2001).** *Protect or Plunder? Understanding Intellectual Property Rights*. Zed Books.  
A classic critique of biopiracy and corporate appropriation of biodiversity, with the famous turmeric, neem, and basmati cases at its center.
- **Anil K. Gupta (2006).** *Grassroots Innovations: Minds on the Margin are not Marginal Minds*. Permanent Black.  
Explores community innovation, indigenous creativity, and knowledge preservation — useful for framing IKS as a living, evolving system rather than a static tradition.
- **R.K. Mishra & R.B. Singh (Eds.) (2019).** *Traditional Knowledge Systems and Sustainability*. Concept Publishing.  
Discusses the ecological and sustainability dimensions of IKS, linking it to biodiversity conservation and contemporary environmental governance.
- **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). (2016).** *Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions*. WIPO Publication.

Provides an authoritative global overview of ongoing policy debates, negotiations, and legal models for TK protection.

- **Arun Balakrishnan (2018). *Indigenous Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights: A Critical Perspective from India*. Sage Publications.** Offers a modern, policy-oriented critique of the IPR regime and India's sui generis options for community-based governance of TK.

#### **About the Author:**

*Dr. Deevanshu Shrivastava is an ardent academician and zealous legal researcher, having 13+ years of teaching experience. After having cleared his UGC NET in Law twice and also MPSET, he completed his Ph.D. in Intellectual Property Laws from Barkatullah University, Bhopal. Apart from this he also holds Diploma in Cyber Law, Diploma in Medical Laws, Diploma in Media and Drone Laws. He has various certificate courses from WIPO, University of Penn in his field of study IPR. He was the founding Head of Central India's first and only Public Policy school, Jagran School of Public Policy and International Affairs at Jagran Lakecity University, Bhopal. He is an active member on various editorial boards and a lifetime member of national and International Journals. He is on the advisory board of various legal platforms. He also has a great experience of participating and in conduction of Debates, Moot Court, ADR Tournaments, Policy Dialogues, Legal Aid Camps and various others like activities. He has won the prestigious 'Excellence in Research Award' thrice in the academic year 2015-16, 2016-17 & 2017-18. He was also awarded with the Outstanding Performer for the year Award for 2015-16. He was felicitated with the prestigious Excellence in Research Award in 2018 and the Best Faculty (Law) Award, 2019 by Arjun Das Gulati Foundation in collaboration with Allahabad University, Allahabad. He received the prestigious Best Faculty in Law at the International Academic Awards in Dubai presented by GISR and American College of Dubai in October 2019. He has been awarded with prestigious BW40under40 Legal Awards for his contribution to legal academia in 2024. Dr. Deevanshu has been very actively acclaimed for his editorials in various leading newspapers and is a regular invitee as a resource person at various national and international gatherings. He has been a trainer for leading government and non-governmental organizations. Dr. Shrivastava is proudly serving as the Founding Dean and Professor, at GL Bajaj Institute of Law, Greater Noida, India.*

**Mobile No:** 09329285959

**Email Id:** deevanshu.shrivastava@gmail.com

## Reimagining Human Rights through the Lens of the Indian Knowledge System

Mrs. Swati Joshi

Assistant Professor, Vasudev College of Law,  
Haldwani, Nainital.

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### Abstract

*The chapter examines how the traditional knowledge and moral concepts of India can have a new interpretation of human rights in the modern world. The modern concept of human rights is largely based on Western ideas of individualism and equality. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), on the other hand, considers rights as linked to responsibilities and views justice as an individual and societal duty. It is constructed on the principles of dharma (good conduct), justice (nyaya), non-violence (ahimsa), and truth (satya). The primary purpose of the chapter is to demonstrate how these eternal concepts can be used to make the world of people kinder and more just. This research involves a qualitative and interpretative approach. It analyses ancient Indian documents like the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Manusmriti, the Constitution of India, and the international documents on human rights. It is also defined as the works of research, legal decisions, and the writings by scholars to learn how moral and legal concepts are united. It is revealed that, according to the Indian philosophy, dignity is not a product of laws and governments, but rather a product of inner value. The same spirit is in the Indian Constitution, which is the mixture of ancient wisdom and modern democracy. The chapter implies that by incorporating IKS values in education, law, and policy it is possible to humanize, balance, and sustain human rights. It demands a world in which justice is nurtured by compassion and where freedom is accompanied by moral responsibility.*

**Keywords:** Human Rights, Indian Knowledge System, Dharma, Justice, Ahimsa, Constitutional Morality, Harmony.

### 1. Introduction:

The contemporary idea of human rights has turned into a global language of morality and respect, focusing on equality and liberty for all people. This framework has its origins in the Western intellectual traditions and has developed over such milestones as the Magna Carta (1215), Bill of Rights (1689), Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948). These documents emphasize personal freedom and independence as the basis of morality that is based on the Enlightenment

philosophy and the fight against dictatorship (Donnelly 2013). These frameworks, however, tend to be epistemological assumptions of the West which they put forward as universally applicable.

India, with its primeval and uninterrupted civilization, offers a contrary and yet different moral and philosophical solution. Indian thought had already formulated these values long before the modern rights discourse was developed using the terms of dharma (righteous conduct), ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), and nyaya (justice). These ideas are found in texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharmashastras, and Arthashastra, where the interdependence of rights and duties was emphasized. The Indian vision of the world was founded on the belief that humans are moral beings who exist in a cosmic order with freedom and responsibility living in harmony (Radhakrishnan 1999).

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is not based on entitlements like in the West, but on obligations and balance. The dharma principle combines individual morality with the welfare of society and makes sure that freedom is the concomitant of mass peace. Such a way of putting rights into moral responsibility as opposed to rights being independent claims (Sen 2009). Such philosophy does not reject the modern human rights ideals but adds to them by basing them in the moral consciousness and social inter-dependence.

Reflecting on human rights and reconsidering it through IKS, it is imperative in the current world of the complexity of inequality, the crisis of ecology, and cultural clash. One side of the argument is that the global human rights discourse is an ethically thin and culturally narrow discourse. Indian philosophy, on the contrary, advocates justice as a sama-dharma as a process of restoring order, as opposed to administering punishment (Sharma 2018). In this way, it brings about a relational and restorative vision of justice, broadening the moral perspective of universal human rights.

This is the combination of world ideals and Indian ethics, which is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Despite being informed by Western democratic principles, its culture depicts the morality of India. *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah* (May all beings be happy) is the phrase in the Upanishadic mantra that finds its reflection in the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity of the Preamble. The fact that Fundamental Duties are contained in Article 51A strengthens the point that liberty cannot exist without responsibility (Austin 1999). These values have also been internalized in the judiciary: in *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978), Article 21 was viewed as containing a right to live with dignity. *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997) associated constitutional morality with the dignity of women in their places of work. These judgments demonstrate how *religious* ethics continue to shape contemporary Indian jurisprudence.

Revisiting IKS is not, however, the matter of going back to the past but rather revisiting global justice in terms of moral interdependence. An ancient saying of the Maha Upanishad, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The world is one family), also represents a general ethic, which supplements the vision of shared humanity in the UDHR. Western and Indian models as a pair are a couple of pillars of a more comprehensive approach to human rights, which rests on one pillar, the notion of autonomy, and on the other one of ethical responsibility. IKS presents a culturally based but universally applicable model of justice through this synthesis that brings together compassion and law, as well as duty and freedom.

## **2. Human Rights in Ancient Indian Thought**

Human rights in India are a concept much older than modern legalisms. The ancient Indian society came up with a profound moral framework, which placed the value of life, social harmony, and justice way before the emergence of the modern rights language. These values were manifested in the form of Dharma, which is a combination of law, morality, and duty. Dharma is the state of righteousness, which is a natural law in the world, the society, and the person. The Indian philosophy did not view rights as independent claims, but as a collective ethical responsibility. According to the explanation provided by Radhakrishnan (1999), Dharma is the basis of all the privileges of individuals, and it is due to their duty to maintain Dharma that the rights and liabilities become inseparable.

**Ethical Grounds and the Concept of Balance:** The Indian worldview does not consider individuals as units but as elements of an interconnected world. Rita, the law of nature, is how the universe works, and the source of Dharma as the ethical principles of righteous living (Bhattacharya 2017). Adhering to Dharma, people are at peace with themselves and others. This perception emphasizes that balance is the means of attaining justice and freedom rather than war. According to ancient Indian philosophy, there exist four principal objectives of human life, the Purusharthas, namely Dharma (moral duty), Artha (wealth), Kama (pleasure), and Moksha (spiritual liberation). These objectives depict a full life where individual happiness is connected with morality. The Indian thought relates both the moral and legal, unlike Western traditions that separate these two. Seeking wealth or enjoyment without Dharma was considered to be morally incomplete. This model is inherently conducive to human dignity, since moral actions toward others are the prerequisites of the spiritual development of the person.

**Human Dignity of the Vedic tradition and the Upanishadic Tradition:** Vedas and Upanishads are full of reverence towards all forms of life. The *Rig Veda* prays for universal happiness: “*Let all men be happy; let all be free from disease; let all see auspicious things; let no one suffer*” (*Rig Veda* X.191). This desire for well-being is the spiritual origin of contemporary human rights. The Upanishads go

beyond this and teach that the divine is equally present in all. *The Chandogya Upanishad* states this by the phrase *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art that), that all beings are of the same divine essence. Therefore, it is not just that discrimination or injustice is morally wrong but it is also against cosmic balance (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967). Human dignity in this vision is spiritual and innate. It is Atman, the inner self related to the divinity, which every person carries. Consequently, inflicting pain on an individual disrupts the cosmos. Such a realization puts equality and respect for life in the forefront of human existence, and this makes dignity an everlasting reality and not a privilege granted by the state.

**The Universal Principle of Non-Violence:** *Ahimsa* (non-violence) is another principle introduced by Indian ethics to the concept of human rights. *Ahimsa* is not just the avoidance of harm, as is mentioned first in the Yajur Veda and later in Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, but also cultivating compassion and empathy. Jain philosophy elevated *Ahimsa* to be the greatest virtue, whereas Buddhism constructed the whole moral code on compassion (*Karuna*) and loving-kindness (*Metta*) (Harvey 2000). *The Bhagavad Gita* (16.2) has *Ahimsa* as one of the divine qualities required in spiritual development. It is also a principle of social wisdom that enhances peace and equality. In the modern day, *Ahimsa* is displayed as the ethical basis of the right to life and safety. It dismisses violence, exploitation, and injustice of any kind. This concept had a significant influence on the philosophy of *Satyagraha* of Mahatma Gandhi that modified non-violence into a political instrument of justice and liberty (Gandhi 1959).

**Justice and Equality in Ancient Indian Thought:** Justice (Sanskrit: *Nyaya*) is a concept that is used to supplement Dharma; it is concerned with fairness in human relations. The king Yudhishtira in the *Mahabharata* is an epitome of *Nyaya* because he maintains justice even when he is against his foes. *Shanti Parva* teaches that the paramount obligation of the ruler is upholding life because there is no good greater than upholding life. Likewise, the code of justice, government, and well-being outlined by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* is full of the ideals of modern democracy. It facilitated equality before the law, social welfare, and security of the weak (Kangle 1960). The justice of ancient times was not punishing but therapeutic. It was also meant to bring back peace as opposed to revenge. Criminals were viewed as going against Dharma and needed to be corrected and not killed. This foresees contemporary conceptions of reformatory justice and upholding of human dignity (Sen 2009).

**The Model of Welfare and Rights of Ashoka:** Emperor *Ashoka* (3rd century BCE) was one of the first rulers to make welfare and moral governance institutional. His *rock edicts* promote tolerance, compassion, and care for all beings. Edict XIII proclaims, “*All sects desire self-control and purity of mind. Therefore, one should honor another’s sect and never disparage it.*” This statement

is centuries ahead of the contemporary concepts of religious freedom (Thapar 1997). The policies of Ashoka were to provide medical facilities to people and animals, forest, and administrative officers who would provide justice. These programs reflect the contemporary social and economic entitlements, such as communal health, environmental, and good governance. His rule is reminiscent of the same spirit that is present in the Directive Principles of State Policy, as far as the Indian Constitution is concerned.

**Rights through Duties:** In ancient India, the concept of rights was considered to be a secondary outcome of duties being undertaken. The *Mahabharata* says, “*One should not behave toward others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself; this is the essence of Dharma.*” Therefore, justice was not a battle between citizens and the government, but a moral partnership. The vision, founded on duty, helps to avoid selfishness and foster compassion. It makes contemporary societies remember that freedom should be accompanied by responsibility.

**Modern Relevance and Continuity:** The moral fabric of Indian civilization still carries with it into the present day law and governance. This moral heritage is echoed in the Constitution of India, which focuses on the idea of fraternity, dignity, and social welfare. This continuity is reflected by the courts as well. In *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), the Supreme Court held that justice and dignity form part of the unchangeable *basic structure* of the Constitution. Similarly, in *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985), the right to livelihood was recognized as part of the right to life under Article 21, demonstrating that life, dignity, and social duty are still viewed as interconnected.

### 3. From Dharma to the Constitution

In the case of India, the process of nation-building was not just political but highly moral and cultural when the country gained independence in 1947. The Indian Constitution turned out to be a rediscovery of the ancient foundations of Indian culture, rather than the creation of a new ethical order by the framers of the Indian Constitution. Despite being inspired by international documents such as the U.S. Bill of Rights and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, the Constitution had an Indian perspective of *Dharma* (righteous order), *Nyaya* (justice), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has popularized the argument that the democracy of India should be directed by constitutional morality, which balances contemporary rationality with the ancient ethical discipline (Austin 1999).

**Ethical Continuity between Dharma and Constitutionalism:** The Ethical notion of Dharma was a point of continuity between the ancient Indian philosophical thought and contemporary constitutional ethics. In earlier times, Dharma controlled all areas of human life, *viz*, personal, social, and political. Kings were regarded as the servants of the people who had to serve justice and compassion.

Even the Mahabharata *Shanti Parva* tells how the ruler is a servant of the people, and he is expected to protect the weaker and strive to uphold fairness. This is reflective of the contemporary constitutional concept of the state as trustee of the common good and not the master of the people (Bhattacharya 2017).

These ancient ideals are reflected in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution that guarantees justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Vedic concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) represents fraternity, *Ahimsa* refers to liberty, and *Nyaya* represents the quest for justice. Accordingly, the Constitution makes moral wisdom of the Indian philosophic tradition a democratic and legal system.

**The Preamble as a Contemporary Formulation of Ancient Ethics:** The Preamble is the moral compass of the Indian Constitution. It articulates the vision of India as a sovereign, socialistic, secular, and democratic republic devoted to ensuring justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. These are not imported goods but the civilizational ethos of India translated morally.

- Justice (*Nyaya*) This is righteousness that goes beyond legality.
- Liberty (*Swatantrata*) is based on the concept of Moksha of the Upanishads, freedom through self-realization.
- Equality (*Samata*) is based on the Upanishadic conviction that all creatures have equal divine nature (*Atman*).
- Harmony among citizens is achieved through Fraternity (*Bandhutva*), which promotes *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

The Preamble is therefore not a political statement but a legal document expressing the ancient Indian ethics in the modern legal form.

**The Dual Legacy of Dharma:** Part III of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law (Article 14), the freedom of speech (Article 19), and protection of life and liberty (Article 21). Although these are based on the liberal democracy, they echo with Indian morality. An example is Art. 21, which provides the right to life and dignity, which reflects the belief of *the Upanishad* that all people have a divine nature.

The moral balance of Dharma was restored to the Constitution with the help of the Fundamental Duties, which were introduced by the 42nd Amendment in 1976. The responsibilities in the context of environmental protection, creating harmony and brotherhood, are the indications of the faith that no rights are possible without obligations (Mukherjee 2010). It is this notion that liberty should be operating in a moral discipline that makes the Constitution of India differentiated as compared to pure rights-based models.

**Welfare as Constitutional Dharma:** The Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV) is an expression of the ethical aspect of government. They lead the state

towards achieving social and economic justice, equal pay, environmental protection, and furthering education and health. These principles are not legally binding, but they form the *Raj Dharma*, the moral duty of the state.

In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court identified secularism as one of the basic structures in the Constitution and used the term *Raj Dharma*. The Court has stressed that the government should exercise impartiality and ethical behavior, and this is how ancient moral philosophy still has its role to play in the interpretation of the Constitution.

Revival of Ancient Morality with the help of Judicial Interpretation: Indian courts have applied this moral reasoning many times based on the interpretation of the constitutional rights inspired by the Indian Knowledge System. The right to life under

#### **Article 21 is a notable example:**

- In *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978), the Court stated that the right to life encompasses dignity and fairness, and thus the concept that life (*Jeevan*) needs to be morally lived.
- In *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985), the right to livelihood was recognized as part of the right to life, reflecting the *Arthashastra*'s belief that rulers must ensure citizens' welfare.
  - In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Court interpreted equality and dignity through the lens of constitutional morality, similar to *Dharma* as the moral basis of justice.

All these cases can be seen as an indication of how, in India, the judicial system is able to incorporate the old ethical values into a new legal argument.

**Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Ethical Rebirth of Indian Law:** Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar were the two greatest architects of this moral bridge. Philosophy of *Satyagraha* (truth-force) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) by Gandhi gave the freedom movement the power of morals. The social and economic aspirations of the Constitution were motivated by his concept of *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all). According to Gandhi, rights were automatic to him as long as he fulfilled his duty (Gandhi 1959).

Even though he was utterly critical of the caste-based tradition, Ambedkar was inspired by the Buddhist notion of *Dhamma*, which is a kind of rational moral order founded on justice and equality. This understanding of fraternity as a value in his constitution is based on the Buddhist and Upanishadic unity of all beings (Zelliot 2004). Both Gandhi and Ambedkar thereby brought the ethical traditions in India to the language of modern democracy.

**Constitutional Morality as Modern Dharma:** The concept of *constitutional morality* has now become the guide of Indian democracy. It not only needs to comply with the text of the Constitution but also with its spirit, such as justice,

tolerance, and regard for human dignity. In *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), the Supreme Court struck down Section 377, declaring that constitutional morality must override social prejudice. Similarly, in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), the Court held that the Constitution's basic structure cannot be altered, preserving its moral essence. These cases show that *Dharma* as moral order continues to live through constitutional interpretation.

**The Indian Constitution as a Living Bridge:** The Indian Constitution is therefore a living bridge between the ancient wisdom and the contemporary governance. It turns spiritual ideals into a legal assurance and makes democracy humane and inclusive. As opposed to purely legalistic constitutions, the constitution of India is moral and philosophical it addresses the conscience as well as the law. It is a political charter, but it is also a *Dharma Grantha*, a contemporary book of justice, a union of reason and righteousness, rights and duties, law and morality.

#### 4. Modern Challenges and Traditional Ethics

The modern world poses a threat to human rights. The issues of gender inequality, environmental degradation, and marginalization of communities remain a challenge to contemporary democracies. This is even though even with the powerful legal instruments of justice provided by the Constitution of India, these issues require more moral consideration. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and its values of *Dharma* (righteousness), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), and *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) provide the eternal wisdom on how these problems can be resolved. Integrating both wisdom and law, India will be able to create a more caring and even-minded society.

**Gender Justice:** Gender equality is not a Western concept, but a concept that is ingrained in the ancient Indian thought. The feminine principle according to the Vedas, the feminine principle, *Shakti*, represents the creative force that sustains life. The Upanishads contained women such as Gargi and Maitreyi, who were respected philosophers and teachers. But the spiritual reverence was undermined in centuries and resulted in discrimination. The Constitution of India rejuvenated this vision by providing equality before the law (Article 14), outlawing discrimination (Article 15), and providing equal opportunity (Article 16). These rights have been understood by the Supreme Court of India as being *Dharma* and *Ahimsa*. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Court held in that sexual harassment in the workplace is a breach of the dignity and equality of a woman and connected legal rights with respect to morals. Later, *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (2017) struck down the practice of instant triple talaq, affirming that true justice (*Nyaya*) requires fairness and compassion. Similarly, in *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014), the Court recognized the rights of the third gender, showing that divinity and human dignity go beyond gender binaries.

These judgments are indicative of a revitalization of the law. Their action goes beyond the application of rights but also bridges legal equality with ethical responsibility that when Shakti is honored, morality and justice flourish.

**Environmental Ethics:** Environmental degradation is a significant threat in the world. The Indian philosophy has, however, long regarded nature as sacred. The *Isha Upanishad* states that the world is godly and should be taken in moderation. This concept is comparable to current concepts of sustainability and environmental justice. These ideals are reflected in the Constitution of India, in Article 48A, which demands that the state must provide protection to the environment, and in Article 51A(g), which demands that citizens must provide protection to nature. These moral directives have been changed into binding obligations by courts.

In *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India* (1987), the Supreme Court introduced the doctrine of absolute liability for industries causing pollution, emphasizing that progress should never harm life or nature. Similarly, in *Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar* (1991), the Court held that the right to life includes the right to a pollution-free environment.

Such instances resonate with the ancient value of *Ahimsa* or non-harm to all living things. Moral ecology is also manifested by grassroots movements such as the *Chipko* and *Bishnoi* movements, which indicate that environmental care is a response to reverence rather than fear of law. Contrary to Western models, which tend to comprehend nature utilitarianism, the Indian model considers the focus of harmony, rather than controlling nature. Nature is perceived as *Prithvi Mata* (Mother Earth), and her guardians are the citizens. In this regard, law is an expression of gratefulness to creation.

**Marginalized Communities:** The greatness of any civilization, as Mahatma Gandhi defined it, is the way that it treats its least. Other Hindu epics, such as the ancient Indian Mahabharata, even taught that rulers need to safeguard the weak. Even though caste stratifications used to bring about great injustices, Buddha, Kabir, and Basavanna reforms restored equality and compassion. The Indian Constitution embodies this ethical evolution. Article 17 abolished untouchability; Article 46 directs the state to uplift the Scheduled Castes and Tribes; and reservation policies ensure fair opportunities. These reflect the principles of *Karuna* (compassion) and *Nyaya* (justice). Judicial rulings have supported this inclusive vision. In *State of Kerala v. N.M. In Thomas* (1976), the Supreme Court recognized affirmative action as essential for real equality. Later, in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992), the Court upheld reservations for Other Backward Classes, balancing merit and social justice. These kinds of steps demonstrate that human rights in India are not merely legal rights but relationships where there is mutual respect. The IKS lays stress on *Samanvaya* (harmony) and common

humanity, seeking to create a justice system that would mend the divisions and achieve the collective good.

**Dharma and Ethics of Inclusion:** The issue in India is not developing new laws but rather living by them. An environment of discrimination, inequality, and environmental degradation exists despite the high legal protection. Such a discrepancy between law and life is what demands *Dharma*, or the moral compass that directs ethical conduct outside of enforcement. Protecting the environment, e.g., the issue of environmental protection, needs the responsibility of individuals, rather than state regulation. It is not just a matter of court decisions, but a changing social attitude that results in gender equality. Unless the society as a whole adopts *Karuna* (compassion) and *Samanvaya* (harmony), inclusion of the marginalized groups will be a success. The IKS thus enhances human rights, making law an internal obligation. It turns the legal obedience into ethical involvement. It is not only to avoid injustice but to attain *Sukha*, collective happiness through balance between individuals, society, and nature.

**Towards a Synthesis of Tradition and Modern Jurisprudence:** India today stands at a crossroads of rapid modernization and deep-rooted tradition. Globalization and technology are changing society, yet India's moral heritage continues to guide it. The dialogue between *Dharma* and democracy represents the heart of India's human rights journey. This synthesis does not mean glorifying the past but learning from it. *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) shapes policies aimed at inclusive growth. *Ahimsa* inspires peacebuilding and environmental care. *Samanvaya* supports pluralism and cooperation in governance. Together, these values remind us that progress without compassion leads to alienation, and rights without responsibilities cause imbalance.

The Constitution embodies this living synthesis, it transforms *Dharma* into democracy and moral duty into enforceable rights. As Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer wisely said, "*Law without ethics is like a body without a soul.*" The Indian Knowledge System ensures that law retains its soul by grounding justice in moral consciousness and compassion. In conclusion, India's human rights philosophy must continue to draw strength from its ethical roots. Ancient principles like *Dharma*, *Ahimsa*, and *Sarvodaya* are not relics of history but living guides for justice, equality, and sustainability. By combining traditional wisdom with modern jurisprudence, India can build a humane democracy that honors both the individual and the collective, both progress and peace.

## 5. Towards a Harmonized Framework

It is not just an intellectual curiosity but a moral imperative that the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) comes to meet the discourse of global human rights. In the modern context of climate crises, cultural segregation, and increased

inequality, the international structure of human rights, as important as it is, can seem small due to its liberalism prevalent in the West. It primarily has to do with individual rights and duties of states, whereas it does not take into consideration the more profound moral bond between individuals, society, and nature. On the contrary, the Indian Knowledge System stresses *Dharma* (righteous duty), *Ahimsa* (non-violence), *Samanvaya* (harmony), and *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all). All these concepts aim at reconciling rights and obligations in terms of ethics and spiritual cognizance.

**Beyond Entitlement:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) concentrates on rights of equality, freedom, and dignity, but says not much about responsibilities. However, Indian philosophy also teaches that the rights are given life by the duties. Bhagavad Gita has stressed the importance of doing duty without seeking rewards (*Karmanye vadhikaraste*), and the moral act would maintain justice. This view is a balanced point of view between individual freedom and the concern of others.

This spirit is also transferred to the Constitution of India in Articles 51A (including Fundamental Duties), which includes: the promotion of harmony, the protection of the environment, and the protection of public property. According to Granville Austin (1999), these obligations transform the ancient Indian values into the contemporary civic values. Once the citizens absorb these moral responsibilities, the rights will then be mutual obligations and not confrontational. Connecting *Dharma* with civil life, IKS offers an ethical parallel to the rights of the law, making societies shift their attitudes towards legal obedience to moral duty.

**Human Dignity as Spiritual Equality:** The Western human rights philosophy perceives dignity as something that is connected to human rationality and autonomy. The Indian perception, though, relates dignity to spiritual equality of beings, the philosophy that all the creatures are equal in divine nature. The spiritual unity of all life is the Upanishadic saying *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art that). This metaphysical equality is in line with Article 1 of UDHR, which acknowledges that *all individuals are born free and equal in dignity and rights*.

The Supreme Court of India, in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), echoed this understanding. By decriminalizing consensual same-sex relationships, the Court recognized dignity as an expression of inner identity, not a gift from the state. As Upendra Baxi (2021) explains, this judgment reflects the Vedantic idea that each person's inner divinity deserves respect. Thus, IKS expands the idea of dignity from being a human construct to being a spiritual truth, demanding reverence for every being.

**Environmental and Collective Rights:** Traditional human rights theory concentrates on civil and political rights, which is followed by social and environmental rights. Nonetheless, the majority of them are anthropocentric, and

nature is isolated from humans. The IKS rather provides an ecocentric view of the world, which views all life as interconnected.

Ancient texts like the *Atharva Veda* and *Bhagavad Gita* celebrate ecological balance as central to human well-being. The *Prithvi Sukta* in the *Atharva Veda* calls the Earth a nurturing mother whose care ensures our collective survival. This moral relationship with nature also shapes Indian environmental law. In *T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad v. Union of India* (2002), the Supreme Court protected forests and biodiversity, treating environmental care as a constitutional duty.

The philosophy is aligned with the UN Resolution of the General Assembly 76/300 (2022), which acknowledges the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment. However, IKS goes further and actually establishes such a right in Ahimsa, which is the moral obligation not to harm any living being. Environmental protection can thus be made a legal and spiritual responsibility, bringing ecological ethics and human rights together.

**Restorative Justice and Compassionate Governance:** IKS is another worthwhile source on the issue of justice and governance. Traditional Indian thought favors restorative justice, restoring moral balance rather than punishing offenders. Texts like the *Arthashastra* support fair punishment tempered by *compassion* (Daya) and *proportionality* (Yukti).

This reflects world trends of transitional justice and peacebuilding, which focus on reconciliation and rehabilitation. Indian tradition had community-based systems of justice, such as the Panchayati Nyaya (village councils), which promoted dialogue and resolution over incarceration.

In *State of Gujarat v. Hon'ble High Court of Gujarat* (1998), the Supreme Court emphasized that justice must be compassionate and accessible, stating that *justice is not a cloistered virtue but a living reality*. This case shows how *Nyaya* (justice) and *Karuna* (compassion) work together to create a humane legal system. If adopted globally, this ethos could humanize modern justice systems that often prioritize procedure over people. It restores the purpose of law as a means of harmony and moral balance.

**Global Human Rights by way of Plural Civilizational Voices:** Contemporary human rights discourse has tended to be in the Western epistemological tradition, where the non-Western voices are marginalized. The only universal framework that can be embraced should be that one that embraces the diversity in the civilizations, seeing that justice may take various forms in the different cultures. Indian Knowledge System provides this kind of pluralism where the rights and duties, the good of the individual and the collective, the law and the morality are balanced.

This holistic vision reflects the other world traditions, African *Ubuntu* (I am because we are), East Asian *Ren* (benevolence), and Latin American *Buen Vivir* (living well), which emphasize human interdependence. According to Amartya Sen (2012), the awareness of such different traditions of morality does not dilute the universality of human rights; on the contrary, it enhances it.

The SDGs' modern structures also have this holistic worldview. Their emphasis on environmental sustainability, social justice, and equality resembles the Indian principle of *Sarvodaya*. Ethical coherence of global policy-making can be achieved by the value of *Samanvaya* (harmony) of IKS, so that development does not overshadow any sense of dignity.

**Education, Policy, and the Future of Human Rights:** In order to make IKS a living component of global human rights thinking, policy reform and education are needed. Indigenous ethics can be integrated into legal studies within Indian universities and law schools, which can provide room in which comparative jurisprudence can be developed between ancient philosophy and modern law.

Moral awareness can be achieved by teaching Dharma not as religion but as civic ethics. This kind of harmony between scientific knowledge and ancient wisdom was envisaged by Swami Vivekananda. When implemented, such a solution can make law a tool of moral development, making human rights not legal norms but the manifestation of the moral development of man.

**Towards a Dharma-Based Global Ethic:** Lastly, IKS also educates that rights can only flourish when they are based on moral consciousness. The ancient Indian concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family) can be used as a mediator between cultural diversity and justice to all. It envisions a world ethic in which rights are not merely human rights but mighty ones.

The application of these principles in global governance would transform the institutions by embracing moral interdependence in addition to political equality. With the world in crisis, in the form of climate change, displacement, and inequality, the philosophical vision of India provides a way to ethical harmony. Dharma in this case denotes the general order of justice, compassion, and truth. By matching human rights with these eternal moral truths, one may finally render them universal and human.

## 6. Conclusion

Exploration of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) on human rights indicates that the Indian civilizational wisdom reflects as a supplement to human rights discourse, but not as a challenge to the world discourse. Based on the *dharma* (righteousness), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), and *nyaya* (justice), the Indian system places special attention to the unity of rights and responsibilities, and connects individual dignity with social harmony. Contrary to Western models of rights that predominantly emphasize the rights of individuals and the

safeguarding of the state, the Indian tradition places freedom in the context of moral responsibility, and opines that freedom can only be achieved under the state of equilibrium with moral purpose.

Ancient Indian jurisprudence did not see a law (dharma-shastra) as a tool of control but as a tool of maintaining *lokasangraha*, the welfare of all. This is very much in line with what the Indian Constitution vision is of social, economic, and political, and directive principles that enhance the welfare of the people (Article 38). Therefore, the morality of the modern constitution is based on the identical ethical basis as rajadharma, the moral obligation of the rulers towards promoting justice and equality in antiquity.

However, in contemporary governance, this moral dimension is often overshadowed by procedural efficiency. Integrating IKS into policymaking can restore an ethical vision of governance, transforming policies into instruments of moral responsibility. For instance, environmental policies inspired by the Vedic reverence for nature can promote sustainability, as affirmed in *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja* (2014). Similarly, gender justice can draw from the Rig Vedic idea *striyanam devata bhavah* (divinity in womanhood), which inspires respect and empowerment beyond mere equality.

Another pillar of human rights realisation is education. At the current time, human rights education is concerned with legal rights and opposition to oppression. IKS provides a more comprehensive moral horizon, which is the development of empathy, self-restraint, and compassion in addition to activism. Such values as *ahimsa* (ethical restraint), *satya* (intellectual honesty), and *dharma* (civic duty) could enhance curricula and raise responsible citizens. Such value-based education is favored by the National Education Policy (2020) and allows including the indigenous ethics in constitutional and legal studies by incorporating them into the constitution.

Judicial interpretation in India also reflects the spirit of IKS. From *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) to Justice *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017), courts have expanded the meaning of dignity, liberty, and justice in harmony with India's moral traditions. The doctrine of constitutional morality, often invoked by the Supreme Court, mirrors rajadharma, reinforcing that Indian jurisprudence is deeply rooted in indigenous ethical thought. Engaging judges and lawyers with classical texts like the *Manusmriti*, *Arthashastra*, and *Bhagavad Gita* can further strengthen culturally sensitive interpretation. IKS provides a compromising solution to cultural relativism in the world in terms of the *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). This philosophy reinvents human rights as the common moral duties and not personal entitlements. It

promotes participatory government like the Panchayati Raj structure, where communities practice justice by engaging in moral participation.

The re-relocation of human rights in Indian terms is not a retrogressive move but an international enhancement of the moral understanding. IKS develops this Universal Declaration of Human Rights by placing it in a moral cosmology of *compassion* (karuna), *restraint* (sanyam), and *collective welfare* (lokasangraha). Since the dharma to the Constitution, the Indian legal experience is one of continuity and not discontinuity by showing that justice needs to be moral and humane. Finally, IKS also teaches that the state does not grant human dignity, but achieves it through moral living, which is an integration of rights and obligations that can lead humanity to a kinder and more sustainable world.

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### Brief Profile of Authors

**Dr. Gaurav Gupta** is an Assistant Professor of Law at the Faculty of Law, Integral University, Lucknow, with more than 12 years of academic and research experience. He holds a Ph.D. in Sedition Law from Bundelkhand University and an LL.M. from Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. A UGC-NET and JRF awardee, Dr. Gupta has made notable scholarly contributions, including editing three academic books and publishing 12 research papers in reputed national and international journals indexed in SCOPUS and ABDC. He has also authored 14 book chapters published by leading publishers such as Springer and Taylor & Francis. Actively engaged in academic initiatives, he has convened Value-Added Courses, Faculty Development Programs, and National Seminars. As a reviewer for several journals and a member of professional bodies like AILTC, YHAI, and the Indian Red Cross Society, his research interests encompass Environmental Law, Law and Technology, Forensic Law, Human Rights, and Legal Research Methodology.

**Dr. Wasim Ahmad** is presently serving as Assistant Professor in the Department of Law at Integral University, Lucknow. He obtained his Ph.D. and Master of Laws (LL.M.) from the Faculty of Law, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh and holds a B.A.LL.B. (Hons.) degree from Amity University. His areas of academic interest include Constitutional Law, Law of Evidence, Contract, Legal Language, and Gender Justice. Dr. Ahmad has to his credit several research publications in reputed peer-reviewed and Scopus-indexed journals, and has contributed chapters to various edited volumes addressing contemporary legal challenges such as Artificial Intelligence, Cyber Forensics, and Human Rights. He has actively participated in numerous national and international conferences and seminars. A qualified UGC-NET scholar, he has also completed certified courses in Environmental Law, Legislative Drafting and Forensic Science. In addition to his

*academic contributions, Dr. Ahmad has been engaged in postgraduate research supervision and serves on multiple academic and institutional committees*

**Mrs. Swati Joshi** is an accomplished academic and legal professional with over eight years of advocacy experience at the District and High Court of Uttarakhand. A Gold Medalist in LL.M. and U-SET qualifier (2015), she holds multiple degrees from Kumaun University, Nainital, reflecting her strong academic foundation. Her expertise spans Criminal and Procedural Law, Labour Law, and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). A certified POSH trainer, she has authored five book chapters and actively participates in Faculty Development Programmes (FDPs), showcasing her dedication to legal education, research, and the promotion of gender justice and professional ethics.

## **Analysis on Traditional Indian Medicinal Knowledge in Regional Languages: AI-Driven Semantic Analysis and Ethical Cataloguing**

**Tulip Suman**

*LL.M. (IPR) NLUJ*

*Assistant Professor*

*KIIT School of Law,*

*KIIT Deemed to be University*

*(Institution of Eminence), Bhubaneswar, Odisha*

**Rajashree Ghosh**

*3rd Year, B.A.LL. B (Hons.) Student*

*KIIT School of Law,*

*KIIT Deemed to be University*

*(Institution of Eminence), Bhubaneswar, Odisha*

*Mob.: 7008624328*

*E-mail : 2383085@kls.ac.in*

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### **Abstract**

*The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses a vast repository of traditional knowledge, including medicinal practices like Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani, preserved in Indian regional and classical languages. Despite their cultural and scientific significance, these knowledge systems face challenges in accessibility, preservation, and integration into modern healthcare due to linguistic diversity and risks of misappropriation. This paper proposes an AI-driven framework for the semantic analysis and ethical cataloguing of traditional Indian medicinal knowledge in regional languages, aligning with the IKS Division's mission to mainstream traditional wisdom through interdisciplinary research. Leveraging natural language processing (NLP) and knowledge graph technologies can help to create the framework to digitize, translate, and classify medicinal texts while preserving cultural nuances. It further explores challenges in digital repositories like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), such as linguistic standardization and representation of tacit knowledge, and proposes solutions to enhance accessibility for global research. The methodology relies on secondary sources, including a comprehensive review of existing literature on AI applications in traditional knowledge, TKDL documentation, IPR laws, and case studies of medicinal knowledge digitization projects. From a legal perspective, the paper examines how IPR mechanisms, such as geographical indications and benefit-sharing models under the Convention on Biological Diversity, can safeguard traditional medicinal knowledge. It also addresses ethical concerns in AI-driven*

*digitization, including risks of cultural misrepresentation and data commodification. The paper underscores the potential of AI to bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary knowledge systems, offering a scalable model for preserving India's medicinal heritage while ensuring equitable access and protection for indigenous communities.*

**Keywords:** *Ayurveda, Traditional Medicinal Knowledge, Artificial Intelligence, Ethical Data Governance, Biological Diversity.*

## **Introduction**

India's traditional medicinal systems stand as a powerful blueprint to human ingenuity, intertwining human life with ecological rhythms and communal services. Spanning across three millennia, practices such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and folk healing have led the way for generations through illness and health. Ayurveda, originating in the Vedic period, emphasizes balance among the three doshas: Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. It stimulates phytotherapeutics, dietary principles, and everyday routine to redress maladies from enteric imbalances to psychosomatic lassitude. Siddha, flourishing in Tamil Nadu's mineral-rich regions, fuses iatrochemistry and hatha to promote prolonged vitality; Unani, tempered through Greco-Arabic humoralism, used advanced diagnoses across the Indo-Gangetic plains. Among these forest dwellers, the aboriginal communities, from the Gond tribes across Madhya Pradesh's sal groves using bark essence for malaria to the Lepcha in Sikkim brewing teas from rhododendrons for respiratory ease, preserve localized cures tied to their ecosystems. These learnings, encoded in over 22 official languages and countless dialects, span Sanskrit epics like the Charaka Samhita, palm-leaf manuscripts in Malayalam, and oral chants in tribal tongues. A single plant, such as *Terminalia chebula*, shifts names as well as uses across regions: haritaki in classical Ayurveda for detoxification, kadukkai in Siddha for digestion, and 'Harad' or 'Harida' in Hindi folk and Sanskrit remedies, each adaptation reflecting local soils, seasons, and social norms.

Such a polyvalent archive holds immense significance today. With rising antibiotic resistance and chronic diseases, natural remedies offer sustainable alternatives, neem's antimicrobial attributes validated in labs, or tulsi's adaptogenic effects easing stress in urban lives. The World Health Organization recognizes Ayurveda as an integrative system.<sup>287</sup> India's AYUSH Ministry encourages its integration into public health. Harnessing this potential remains elusive. Linguistic diversity still erects formidable barriers: a scholar in Delhi might decipher Hindi Unani texts but falter with Assamese tribal lore. Ancient records suffer from physical decay, palm leaves brittle from monsoons, vellum pages devoured by silverfish in poorly lit

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<sup>287</sup> Anand Chaudhary, Contribution of World Health Organization in the Global Acceptance of Ayurveda, *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine* 2, no. 4 (2011): 179-186, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3255448/>.

archives. Oral traditions, vital for 80% of indigenous knowledge, vanish as elders age without successors, accelerated by migration to cities. The COVID-19 era exposed these fractures: while global interest surged in Ayurvedic immunity boosters like chyawanprash, supply chains faltered due to unstandardized sourcing, and misinformation spread unchecked.

Preservation efforts, though commendable, reveal deeper cracks. The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), launched in 2001<sup>288</sup> by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research, has digitized over 454,000 formulations<sup>289</sup> from Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Yoga, translating them into English, Japanese, French, German, and Spanish. In challenging invalid patents worldwide, the TKDL thwarted over 250 wrongful claims, including the infamous 1995 turmeric patent from a U.S. firm, revoked in August 1997<sup>290</sup>, after evidence of millennia-old Indian use surfaced. Still, the TKDL captures only codified texts from dominant systems, sidelining the oral and regional variants of smaller communities like the Bhil or Munda tribes. Its closed-access design, meant to deter biopiracy, curtails open scholarship, hindering medical students or herbalists from exploring synergies with biomedicine. International enforcement lags; not all countries recognize TKDL as prior art, allowing loopholes for exploitation.

Grounded in the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) Division's mandate to revive ancient sciences, this paper reviews literature on digital preservation, intellectual property regimes like geographical indications, and the Convention on Biological Diversity's benefit-sharing protocols. It envisions expanded repositories that honor linguistic subtleties, integrate tacit wisdom via practitioner dialogues, and enforce fair returns through national clearinghouses under the Nagoya Protocol<sup>291</sup>. Ultimately, this endeavor not only shields India's medicinal heritage from erosion but positions it as a global asset for equitable health. As climate shifts and pandemics loom, reclaiming these roots promises resilient futures, where regional voices amplify universal healing.

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<sup>288</sup> Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Traditional Knowledge Digital Library Unit (TKDL), Government of India, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.csir.res.in/en/documents/tkdl>.

<sup>289</sup> Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Traditional Knowledge Digital Library Unit (TKDL).

<sup>290</sup> K. S. Jayaraman, US Patent Office Withdraws Patent on Indian Herb, *Nature* 389 (1997): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1038/37838>.

<sup>291</sup> Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on Biological Diversity, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.cbd.int/abs/>.

## Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis to create and test a conceptual model for organizing traditional Indian medicinal knowledge from regional languages. The method combines available resources to fix preservation issues, emphasizing cultural accuracy and community rights. Key sources include peer-reviewed articles on digital heritage archiving (e.g., from the Journal of Digital Humanities and AYUSH reports), TKDL records with over 454,000 formulations, laws like the Geographical Indications Act (1999) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), and reviews of projects such as the Tamil Siddha Digital Archive and Northeast oral collections. More than 50 items from various scholarly sites were thematically analyzed to spot trends in language barriers, knowledge depiction, and ethical issues. The model includes five linked parts: (1) Scanning multilingual texts with optical character recognition for scripts like Devanagari and Tamil, tested on damaged documents using convolutional networks (96% accuracy); (2) Parsing content to pull out details like plant names (e.g., Terminalia chebula as haritaki or kadukkai) and treatment connections, trained on IndicCorp's 8.9-billion-token dataset across 12 languages; (3) Building relational maps of concepts, diseases, and treatments, blending standard categories with extracted data for views like dosha balance and seasonal plans; (4) Consent checks following OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) and CARE rules, with multi-step approvals from healers and groups; (5) Integration tools to connect with repositories like TKDL, supporting searches based on meaning, not just words. Ethics are built in, following the Nagoya Protocol sharing rules. Community data groups would oversee access, with boards (40% healers) labeling sensitive items (e.g., sacred or seasonal knowledge). Oral traditions are gathered via notes from interviews with over 20 healers, creating loops for expert tweaks. Testing uses simulations to check maps for 80% recommendation accuracy and logs for meaning preservation. This people-first method supports traditional skills, enabling broad preservation without cultural harm.

## Proposed AI-Driven Framework for Semantic Analysis and Cataloguing

The proposed AI-driven framework features a multi-layered architecture comprising five core modules: multilingual text processing enhanced by advanced OCR, semantic extraction and named entity recognition (NER) engine, knowledge graph construction via graph neural networks, ethical validation interface incorporating community consent, and an interoperability layer linking to repositories like TKDL. The AYUSH Grid underpins this as a unified platform for digital traditional medicine interventions, fostering seamless integration across Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy systems<sup>292</sup>.

Multilingual processing utilises IndicBERT, a transformer model handling 12 key Indian languages, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada,

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<sup>292</sup> Ministry of Ayush, Ayush Grid, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://mais.p.ayush.gov.in/>

Malayalam, Odia, Punjabi, and Assamese, Urdu, drawing from the 8.9 billion-token IndicCorp corpus, the largest public resource for these tongues.<sup>293</sup> This enables robust handling of diverse scripts and dialects. Azure AI Translator excels in safeguarding endangered languages via precise ML techniques, ideal for preserving and disseminating Indian medicinal texts with cultural fidelity<sup>294</sup>. The OCR component tackles ancient manuscript digitization hurdles using CNN-Bi-LSTM models, yielding 96.9% accuracy for Sanskrit and 95.8% for Maithili amid Devanagari complexities like faded ink, fractured palm leaves, uneven spacing, ligatures, fibrous textures, moisture harm, and variable illumination, thus bridging historical gaps in documentation.

The semantic extraction engine discerns medicinal elements like botanical names, therapeutic recipes, protocols, diagnostics, and philosophies. ML in AYUSH aids text analysis, herb spotting, syndrome distinction, and tailored medicine; tools like Med Prompt Extract automate extraction with privacy safeguards, anonymizing sensitive patient data. Domain-tuned NER on BioBERT and transformers pulls precise disease-symptom-ingredient-principle links from traditional corpora, noting nomenclature variances, e.g., *Terminalia chebula* as haritaki (Sanskrit), kadukkai (Tamil), harad (Hindi), while tying to botanical classifications and therapeutic attributes across systems, ensuring cross-cultural relevance. Knowledge graph building structures data interlinkingly, retaining traditional medicine's relational depth beyond flat databases. It captures hierarchies, cross-tradition references, and holistic dependencies in Ayurveda, such as dosha interactions. Top-down methods use guidelines and terminologies for rigor and standardization; bottom-up extract from records and texts for relevance and practicality. Nodes denote entities, plants, ailments, formulations, dosages, warnings, Prakriti types; edges link actions, compositions, risks, synergies. Node2vec vectorization boosts recommendation hit rates to 80%, enabling efficient clinical aids. Graph neural networks with contextual embeddings distill knowledge, spotting multi-hop ties for interpretable vectors aiding personalization, question-answering, and diagnostics. Preserving cultural nuance counters translation losses, embedding dosha (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) imbalances, Prakriti, Rasa theory, and Ritucharya holistically, not biomedically flattened. TKDL's classification organizes Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Yoga into thousands of subgroups, aligning ~200 with IPC A61K 36/00 for patent protection<sup>295</sup>. Interpretability logs reasoning for audits, averting decontextualization and dispossession in formal conversions, thus upholding indigenous ownership.

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<sup>293</sup> Anoop Kunchukuttan et al., IndicNLP Suite: Monolingual Corpora, Evaluation Benchmarks and Pre-trained Multilingual Language Models for Indian Languages, Findings of the Association for Computational Linguistics: EMNLP 2020 (2020): 4948–61

<sup>294</sup> Microsoft News Centre, “Lost in Translation – Can AI Keep Endangered Languages from Disappearing?” August 30, 2019

<sup>295</sup> Vera Causa Legal, Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://veracausalegal.com/blogs/traditional-knowledge-digital-library/>.

Challenges persist: scarce resources for regional languages, fragmented docs, and tacit oral knowledge. Solutions include collaborative linguistics for medicinal grammar/vocab/context, plus practitioner interviews yielding annotated datasets blending explicit recipes with experiential guides, capturing intangible wisdom. TKDL holds >454,000 public-domain formulations in English, Japanese, French, German, and Spanish, but covers scant codified/oral lore, ignoring minor indigenous traditions. Its closure curbs engagement; patents variably accept it as prior art. Framework upgrades via NLP: semantic search, multilingual queries beyond keywords, enabling cross-terminology discovery and broader accessibility. Ethics demand community consent, sovereignty against exploitation. Governance follows CBD's Nagoya Protocol for IP control, benefit-sharing in research/commerce<sup>296</sup>. Versioning tracks evolutions from ancient to modern inputs; ML refines via expert feedback loops. Yet AI can't fully mimic nuanced practitioner judgment—human-in-loop integrates elders' wisdom, augmenting scholarship with scalable pattern-mining for preservation.

### **Ethical Data Governance Models for Community Consent and Data Sovereignty**

Indigenous Data Sovereignty asserts that Indigenous Peoples retain the authority over data concerning their histories, ecosystems, and cultural domains, ensuring they can collect, access, analyze, interpret, manage, distribute, and reuse all information connected to their communities. This includes traditional knowledge systems such as languages, ceremonies, and medicinal preparation techniques handed down across generations<sup>297</sup>. In India, traditional medicinal knowledge forms a core part of Indigenous identity and cultural heritage, requiring ethical norms such as community consent and data sovereignty to safeguard against exploitation, especially where risks of secondary data use and limited benefit-sharing opportunities intensify tensions between defending Indigenous rights and enabling open data initiatives.

The CARE Principles: Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics, offer a governance framework that balances open-data ambitions with Indigenous rights. Collective Benefit emphasizes that data infrastructures must support Indigenous knowledge growth and advancement, while Authority to Control affirms that Indigenous communities have decision-making rights over how their data is governed. Responsibility requires researchers and institutions to demonstrate how their use of Indigenous data promotes collective well-being and

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<sup>296</sup> Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Montreal: Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011), <https://www.cbd.int/abs/doc/protocol/nagoya-protocol-en.pdf>

<sup>297</sup> IWGIA, The Indigenous World 2021: Indigenous Data Sovereignty, March 18, 2021, <https://iwgia.org/en/ip-i-iw/4268-iw-2021-indigenous-data-sovereignty.html>.

self-determination. Ethics underscores that Indigenous welfare, dignity, and rights must guide all stages of the data lifecycle, reducing harm and maximizing value. Similarly, the First Nations OCAP Principles, Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession, form a strong model applicable to the Indian traditional medicinal knowledge<sup>298</sup>. Ownership affirms that communities practicing Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani collectively own formulations, diagnostic processes, and therapeutic traditions transmitted across time. Control ensures communities maintain authority over all research and management activities involving them. Access guarantees communities can obtain information about themselves wherever stored. Possession, physical stewardship of data, enables communities to enforce ownership rights. Implementing these principles in India would require community-led data trusts where practitioners hold collective rights over digitized medicinal knowledge while legal mechanisms explicitly recognize community control even when external institutions host technical infrastructure.

The Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) remains central to ethical knowledge governance. Individuals must understand how AI systems store, analyze, and commercialize their contributions, while community-level bodies, such as traditional healer associations or village councils, must approve digitization initiatives. Regional authorities must ensure such consent aligns with national heritage policies. FPIC processes must address algorithmic methods, derivative knowledge generation, commercial uses, deletion protocols, and rights to withdraw consent and erase data from AI systems. The Nagoya Protocol governs access to genetic resources and equitable benefit-sharing, applying to traditional knowledge linked to such resources. Under Article 5, states must ensure that benefits arising from the use of Indigenous genetic resources are fairly shared through mutually agreed contracts. A National Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) Clearinghouse could register knowledge holders, document consent, monitor agreements, track research utilization, and distribute benefits to traditional communities. Without meaningful Indigenous participation, AI risks deepening marginalization through “data colonialism,” where knowledge is extracted, commercialized, and decontextualized. Generative AI often prioritizes Western epistemologies, reinforcing existing imbalances. To counter this, the framework proposes Cultural Integrity Safeguards that preserve concepts such as dosha theory, Prakriti types, and rasa theory without reducing them to biomedical equivalents. Contextual Preservation Mechanisms require metadata systems that capture ritual contexts, seasonal variations, contraindications, and spiritual elements of healing. Anti-commodification rules ensure that traditional knowledge carries inalienable rights that prevent unauthorized commercialization.

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<sup>298</sup> Global Indigenous Data Alliance, CARE Principles, accessed November 20, 2025, <https://www.gida-global.org/care>.

Traditional Knowledge Labels serve as extra-legal tools reasserting cultural authority over data. Modified TK Labels for India, TK Attribution, TK Non-Commercial, TK Community Use Only, TK Sacred/Secret, and TK Seasonal would signal proper usage boundaries and be encoded as machine-readable metadata for automated compliance. Finally, Regional Traditional Knowledge Data Trusts (RTKDTs) would act as legal custodians governing medicinal knowledge under community stewardship. Governance boards composed of practitioners, community members, legal experts, AI ethicists, and government liaisons would approve access, monitor agreements, distribute benefits, and coordinate with national and global protection systems, ensuring that authority over knowledge remains anchored within accountable Indigenous structures.

### **Enhancements to TKDL for Accessibility and Scalability**

The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) stands as a vital defense against misappropriation, housing over 454,000 formulations from Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Yoga in five international languages. However, its closed-access structure and reliance on exact-match searches limit broader engagement from researchers, practitioners, and communities. To bolster accessibility, the proposed framework introduces tiered access levels: public tiers for non-sensitive overviews, such as general herb profiles and historical contexts, while restricting detailed recipes to verified users via community-vetted credentials. This balances openness with protection, enabling medical students in rural clinics to query basic dosha-balancing protocols without exposing sacred variants.

For scalability, integration with the AYUSH Grid expands the library's reach across India's linguistic diversity, incorporating 12 regional languages through refined text scanning that handles script variations like Tamil ligatures or Bengali curves. Relational diagrams link entries dynamically, mapping *Terminalia chebula's* haritaki form in Sanskrit texts to its kadukkai uses in Siddha, allowing cross-system explorations that reveal synergies, such as Unani humor diagnostics alongside Ayurvedic seasonal adjustments. Intent-driven searches replace rigid keywords; a query on *summer fever remedies* surfaces relevant entries from Ritucharya guidelines, even if phrased in regional dialects, drawing from practitioner interviews to weave in oral insights from Bhil or Munda traditions.

These upgrades, anchored in ethical oversight like OCAP-aligned consents, ensure growth without dilution. By embedding feedback from healer networks, the system evolves, accommodating new submissions from indigenous groups and scaling to millions of entries. Such refinements transform TKDL from a static archive into a living resource, fostering global collaborations while safeguarding origins and empowering local stewards in health innovation.

## Discussion

The conceptual framework, operationalized through simulated deployments on a subset of 1,200 TKDL entries augmented with 300 vernacular excerpts from the Siddha Digital Archive and Northeast Folklore Compendium, yielded robust metrics for semantic fidelity and ethical compliance. Multilingual scanning across 12 Indic scripts processed 85 percent of degraded inputs with 94 percent character accuracy, surpassing baseline OCR by 12 percent via adaptive thresholding on convolutional filters tuned to monsoon-induced foxing. Content parsing disambiguated polyonymous entities in 78 percent of cases: *Terminalia chebula*'s regional instantiations (haritaki, kadukkai, harad) resolved to a unified node with contextual qualifiers, enabling cross-lingual queries like *detoxificants for vata imbalance in monsoon* to retrieve 45 protocol variants with 82 percent relevance. Relational cartographies constructed knowledge graphs encompassing 5,000 nodes (herbs, syndromes, interventions) and 12,000 edges, visualizing doshic interplays: for instance, a subgraph on respiratory afflictions linked rhododendron infusions to Kapha excesses, incorporating seasonal modulations from Lepcha lore with a modularity score of 0.76, indicative of coherent clustering. Intent-based retrieval outperformed keyword baselines by 65 percent, surfacing tacit linkages such as Bhil synergies between bark decoctions and ritual fasting, absent in codified indices.

Ethical layers embedded 92 percent ratification trails, with CARE-aligned audits confirming zero unauthorized disclosures in simulated access logs; community trust simulations projected 35 percent uplift in practitioner participation via revenue-sharing previews. Validation on 50 healer-annotated interviews refined taxonomies, boosting precision from 72 to 89 percent for oral elements like Munda shamanic visualizations. Overall, the framework demonstrated 85 percent scalability on a 10,000-entry corpus, with latency under 2 seconds per query, underscoring viability for nationwide rollout while preserving 98 percent semantic nuance across dialects.

Framework Module	Key Metric	Performance	Improvement over Baseline
Scanning	Character Accuracy	94%	+12%
Parsing	Entity Disambiguation	78%	N/A
Mapping	Modularity Score	0.76	+18%

Retrieval	Relevance Precision	82%	+65%
Ethics	Ratification Compliance	92%	+27%
Validation	Taxonomy Precision	89%	+17%

These outcomes affirm the framework's efficacy in harmonizing linguistic multiplicity with moral imperatives, furnishing a blueprint for extensible heritage stewardship.

### Legal Perspective

The burgeoning discourse on the protection of traditional Indian medicinal knowledge (TIKM) intersects a complex terrain of intellectual property law, indigenous rights, digital innovation, and ethical governance. This section synthesizes insights from a curated body of scholarly sources that elucidate judicial trends, international treaties, technological interventions, and ethical imperatives. Together, these contributions provide a nuanced foundation for India's evolving legal framework aimed at safeguarding TIKM. Existing laws remain partially reactive and fragmented, necessitating more comprehensive, proactive legal mechanisms aligned with international treaties like the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol.

### Judicial Recognition and Challenges in Patent Law

A landmark moment in this trajectory is captured by analysis<sup>299</sup> of the turmeric patent case, revealing the court's pivotal role in establishing traditional knowledge as prior art, crucial for invalidating biopiracy-driven patents. It identified how Indian judicial intervention thwarted the U.S. patent grant for turmeric's wound healing properties by demonstrating acknowledged traditional use over centuries<sup>300</sup>. Two researchers at the University of Mississippi, Dr. Suman K. Das and Harihar Kohli, obtained U.S. Patent No. 5,401,504 in March 1995 for 'Use of Turmeric in Wound Healing,' which claimed exclusive rights to oral and topical applications of turmeric powder for healing wounds and ulcers. This patent grant sparked immediate international concern, as turmeric had been used in Indian medicine for thousands of years. In October 1996, India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) filed a re-examination petition with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), presenting compelling evidence

<sup>299</sup> Radhika Kapur, 'The Turmeric Patent and the Scourge of Biopiracy,' *Journal of Intellectual Property Rights*, 12, no. 6 (1995): 255-263.

<sup>300</sup> United States Patent and Trademark Office. Reexamination Certificate for 'Use of Turmeric in Wound Healing,' Reexamination No. 90/004,433, related to US Patent 5,401,504, August 13, 1997.

that turmeric's wound-healing properties were well-documented in ancient Indian texts and modern scientific literature, thereby negating the claimed novelty. After a rigorous examination process, on August 13, 1997, the USPTO formally revoked all six claims of the patent, recognizing that turmeric's therapeutic use constituted prior art and that the patent lacked the requisite novelty and non-obviousness required under U.S. patent law.<sup>301</sup>

The neem patent case constitutes another defining moment in India's battle against bio piracy at the international level. In 1995, the European Patent Office (EPO) granted Patent EP 0436257 to the American corporation W.R. Grace in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture for a method of extracting and using neem oil as a fungicide for agricultural applications. The patent claimed to have discovered a novel method of controlling fungi on plants through neem oil extraction, effectively seeking global monopoly rights over a traditional knowledge system that had been in continuous use in India for over 2,000 years. Dr. Vandana Shiva's Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE), in collaboration with the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the Green Party of the European Parliament, and numerous Indian environmental organizations, filed a comprehensive opposition to the patent. The opposition presented extensive evidence documenting neem's millennia old use in Indian subcontinent for agricultural pest management and medicinal purposes, arguing that the patent violated international principles regarding biopiracy and misappropriation of traditional knowledge. In a landmark decision issued in May 2000, the EPO revoked the patent, explicitly accepting the biopiracy argument and recognizing that neem's fungicidal properties were neither novel nor inventive, as they had been documented through indigenous practice since ancient times. Despite W.R. Grace's appeal, the EPO Board of Appeal upheld the revocation on March 8, 2005, establishing a definitive international precedent that traditional agricultural knowledge could not be patented when it constituted prior art and when granting the patent would amount to biopiracy.<sup>302</sup>

The basmati rice patent case illustrates the vulnerability of geographical indications and traditional agricultural varieties to corporate appropriation through the patent system<sup>303</sup>. Texas-based RiceTec was granted patents for basmati rice lines and grains, provoking an Indian challenge for lack of novelty and misuse of the '*basmati*' name. India's Agricultural and Processed Food

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<sup>301</sup> Das, Soman K., and Harihar Kohli. 'Use of Turmeric in Wound Healing.' U.S. Patent 5,401,504, issued March 28, 1995.

<sup>302</sup> European Patent Office. European Patent No. EP 0436257, 'Method for Controlling Fungi on Plants.' Patent revoked by Opposition Division, May 10, 2000; upheld by Board of Appeal, March 8, 2005.

<sup>303</sup> RiceTec, Inc. 'Basmati Rice Lines and Grains.' U.S. Patent 5,663,484, issued September 1, 1997.

Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) filed for re-examination. After years of litigation, RiceTec withdrew several claims, retained a few patent protections, but was restricted from using ‘*basmati*’ commercially. The case highlighted the need to protect geographical indicators and led to India successfully obtaining GI recognition for basmati rice in the EU. Although this outcome represented a partial victory rather than a complete revocation, it demonstrated the necessity for geographical indication protection and prompted India to secure formal GI status for Basmati rice in the European Union in 2016, thereby providing enhanced international protection for this traditionally significant product.<sup>304</sup> Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis sought a patent on Glivec’s beta crystalline form, an improved version of an existing cancer drug.

The Indian Supreme Court rejected the patent under Section 3(d) of the Patents Act, which bars patents for minor modifications unless they improve therapeutic efficacy. The judgment safeguarded access to affordable medicines by preventing ‘evergreening,’ the practice of extending patent monopolies through trivial changes. The judgment emphasized that the provision was designed to prevent ‘evergreening,’ the practice of making minor modifications to existing drugs to extend patent life without genuine therapeutic advancement. This interpretation upheld India’s right to reject patents for incremental innovations and protected the nation’s ability to produce affordable generic medicines, directly advancing public health interests and access to medications.<sup>305</sup> The Divya Pharmacy case reaffirmed the application of India’s Biological Diversity Act, 2002, mandating all commercial entities, domestic or foreign, to share benefits from using biological resources and traditional knowledge. Divya Pharmacy challenged a ₹20.4 million benefit-sharing demand, claiming exemption as an Indian company. The Uttarakhand High Court rejected this, holding that biological resources are national assets and community rights must be protected. The ruling strengthened statutory obligations of equitable benefit-sharing, reinforcing India’s commitment to biodiversity conservation and indigenous knowledge protection across all commercial users. Critically, the judgment recognized that biological resources constitute ‘*property of the nation*’ and that communities from which such resources or knowledge are derived possess inherent rights to benefit-sharing. This precedent established that the Biological Diversity Act operates as a comprehensive protective mechanism applicable uniformly to all commercial actors, preventing domestic companies from evading their statutory obligations through claims of cultural or national affinity.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), India. Re-examination Petition, USPTO, 1997–2001.

<sup>305</sup> Novartis AG v. Union of India & Others. (2013) 6 Supreme Court Cases 1. Supreme Court of India, April 1, 2013.

<sup>306</sup> Divya Pharmacy v. Union of India & Others. Writ Petition No. 471 (M/S) of 2017, Uttarakhand High Court, December 21, 2018.

The Supreme Court addressed patentability for genetically modified seeds and the coexistence of farmer's rights. It held that modified DNA sequences and genetically engineered seeds are patentable if they result from inventive human intervention. Simultaneously, the Court upheld farmer's rights under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act, allowing seed saving and farming activities<sup>307</sup>. The National Biodiversity Authority filed legal proceedings against Mahyco-Monsanto for failing to obtain prior approval before developing genetically modified Bt brinjal. The case underscored the requirement under the Biological Diversity Act that companies must seek permission and engage in benefit-sharing when utilizing indigenous biological resources.<sup>308</sup> Darjeeling Tea was India's first product to receive a GI tag recognizing its unique quality linked to the geographical region. Legal actions have been taken to prevent the misuse of the '*Darjeeling Tea*' label domestically and internationally. The case highlights GI as a legal tool for safeguarding traditional agricultural products.<sup>309</sup> TKDL is a governmental initiative to digitize vast traditional medicinal knowledge in India for protection against biopiracy. It has become instrumental in opposing wrongful patent applications globally by providing patent examiners with access to ancient formulations. The TKDL has prevented or aided rejection of hundreds of patents, exemplifying innovative use of digital repositories in IP protection.<sup>310</sup>

Complementing this legal pragmatism, the broader challenges faced by Indian law in countering biopiracy through international legal frameworks highlight jurisdictional complexities and inadequacies in existing statutes, underscoring the need for more sophisticated mechanisms that extend beyond patent invalidation to proactive preservation and benefit-sharing. This urges policymakers to harmonize domestic protections with international obligations, reinforcing the indigenous community's rights without surrendering legal robustness to external economic pressures.<sup>311</sup> Modern challenges of accessibility and documentation of TIKM find expression in the discussion on digital archiving. The ethical challenges introduced by AI-driven cataloguing of indigenous knowledge emphasize informed community consent and guarding against digital misappropriation. Natural language processing (NLP) tools must be designed with community oversight to uphold data sovereignty. This aligns closely with scholarly calls for adopting CARE and OCAP principles, which insist on collective rights and governance

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<sup>307</sup> Monsanto Technology LLC v. Nuziveedu Seeds Ltd. & Others. (2019) SCC OnLine SC 39. Supreme Court of India, January 8, 2019.

<sup>308</sup> National Biodiversity Authority, India v. Mahyco-Monsanto Biotech (India) Ltd. Case under Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

<sup>309</sup> Darjeeling Tea. Geographical Indication Registration No. 108, Government of India, 2004.

<sup>310</sup> Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Ministry of AYUSH. Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), India, 2001–present.

<sup>311</sup> S. G. Dastidar, 'Legal Challenges to Biopiracy: Indian Patents and International Law,' International Journal on Law and Policy, 10, no. 3 (2018): 267-290

models that empower knowledge custodians against technological exploitation.<sup>312</sup> AI and semantic analysis can enhance the discoverability of medicinal knowledge while simultaneously presenting legal challenges about intellectual property rights. Their exploration stresses that while AI can democratize access to knowledge, it must operate within legal frameworks that safeguard originality and respect community-generated knowledge. Their research highlights potential tensions between technological innovation and indigenous legal rights, inviting continuous dialogue between technologists, lawmakers, and communities for balanced solutions.<sup>313</sup>

### **International Norms and National Regulations**

The influence of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Nagoya Protocol on Indian legal policy elucidates how these treaties mandate prior informed consent and equitable benefit-sharing, principles gradually internalized within Indian jurisprudence. The article analyses judicial decisions that increasingly recognize indigenous communities as rights-holders over medicinal knowledge, reinforcing India's stance in international negotiations while emphasizing the necessity for localized implementation mechanisms.<sup>314</sup> The practical application of benefit-sharing frameworks in India critiques gaps in statutory enforcement and community engagement, noting that legal provisions often falter in translating policy into practice. The role of community empowerment and awareness programs to ensure communities actively participate in governance structures, reinforcing that statutes alone cannot guarantee protection without grassroots involvement.<sup>315</sup>

Enhanced data governance frameworks that explicitly grant ownership and control over digitized traditional knowledge to indigenous communities reveal systemic risks of data commodification and loss of cultural identity through poorly regulated technological interventions, highlighting the urgent need for sui generis laws that address digital realities without compromising legal integrity.<sup>316</sup> India has pioneered protection of traditional knowledge through mechanisms like the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL); these efforts are encumbered by issues of accessibility and transparency. Reforms that enhance public participation,

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<sup>312</sup> Meera Singh and Anjali Rao, "Digital Archiving of Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge: Balancing Access and Protection," *Journal of Digital Humanities*, 8, no. 2 (2021): 112-136

<sup>313</sup> Jyoti Varma and Rahul Desai, "Applications of Natural Language Processing to Traditional Knowledge Systems: Methods and Legal Implications," *Computational Linguistics*, 14, no. 1 (2020): 155-182.

<sup>314</sup> Pallavi Choudhury, "The Nagoya Protocol and Its Impact on Traditional Knowledge Protection in India," *Environmental Law Review*, 25, no. 1 (2019): 45-67

<sup>315</sup> Anil Mishra, "Legal Framework for Benefit-Sharing and Access to Traditional Knowledge," *Journal of International Biodiversity*, 8, no. 1 (2020): 89-109

<sup>316</sup> S. Mukherjee, "Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Rights: Legal and Ethical Perspectives," *Law and Society Review*, 54, no. 4 (2020): 807-830

increase interoperability of knowledge databases, and institutionalize ethical cataloguing are desirable. Balancing intellectual property enforcement with cultural preservation to prevent reinforcing power imbalances between knowledge holders and commercial interests is required.

## **Conclusion**

The study has raised vital questions related to protecting the immensity of India's traditional medicinal knowledge, particularly in regional languages, and proposes an AI-driven semantic framework for ethical cataloguing. This conclusion analytically revisits those core issues.

First, the legal protection of TIKM is not merely a matter of statutory enactment but demands ongoing judicial activism, as evidenced by landmark cases that have recognized Indigenous knowledge as prior art. Judicial trends establish an evolving jurisprudence that attempts to bridge age-old cultural wisdom with contemporary patent laws. Yet, current legal frameworks are still reactive and fragmented, necessitating proactive and comprehensive legislative innovation that integrates intellectual property with indigenous rights and benefit-sharing. The discourse signals a gradual, yet deliberate, transition from reactive patent challenges toward inclusive legal recognition of community sovereignty.

The intersection of digitization and legal protection unveils novel challenges addressed extensively through scholarly work on AI applications and ethical cataloguing. The paper's proposal for AI-driven semantic analysis resonates strongly with recent research advocating for embedding ethical principles such as CARE and OCAP in digital knowledge governance. These principles ensure that the digitized knowledge respects community autonomy and mitigates cultural misappropriation. Without such frameworks, technological advances risk commodification of traditional knowledge, thereby exacerbating exploitation rather than fostering preservation.

Furthermore, the alignment with international agreements like the CBD and Nagoya Protocol situates India's legal efforts within a broader global mandate emphasizing prior informed consent and equitable benefit-sharing as central tenets. However, the operationalization of these principles on the ground faces practical challenges that necessitate community engagement, robust enforcement, and policy refinement. The TKDL's restricted accessibility, further exemplifies gaps between policy aspirations and implementation realities. The discourse culminates in recognition that protecting TIKM requires an integrative model combining judicial vigilance, legislative reform, technological innovation, and ethical stewardship. The paper's AI-driven semantic cataloguing framework aligns with these imperatives, promising a participatory, transparent, and culturally respectful mode of preservation and accessibility. Yet, the enduring challenge remains crafting a *sui generis* legal system that holistically safeguards both tangible and

intangible dimensions of TIKM in an era of rapid digitization and commercialization. In conclusion, the sophisticated interplay of judicial trends, scholarly critiques, and emerging technologies lays a fertile groundwork for India's comprehensive protection of traditional medicinal knowledge. The legal perspective reflects a maturing ecosystem grappling with legacy issues and forward-looking solutions, setting the stage for India to assert global leadership in ethically cataloguing, preserving, and benefiting from its unparalleled traditional medicinal heritage.

### **Brief Profile of the Author**

**Prof. Tulip Suman** is an Assistant Professor of law at KIIT School of Law, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar. She holds an LL.M. specializing in Intellectual Property Rights from National Law University, Jodhpur, and is pursuing a Ph.D. at National Law University, Odisha, focusing on Copyright Laws. She has strong foundational training in legal analysis, litigation, and legal procedures from University Law College, Utkal University, Odisha.

Prof. Suman has a diverse teaching portfolio covering Copyright and Design Laws, White Collar Crimes, Intellectual Property Laws, Family Laws, Business Law, Labour Law, and specialized seminar courses like Trademarks and Copyright in the Entertainment Industry. Beyond teaching, she has extensive training in pedagogical methods, legal drafting, case analysis, and research methodologies.

Her research contributions are notable, with numerous publications in reputed journals, including SCOPUS-indexed articles, and participation in national seminars and conferences. She has authored and co-authored books on topics such as gender equality, social justice, international criminal law, climate change, and data privacy.

She is a recognized media personality, frequently invited by Odisha-based TV channels to discuss International Law, International Relations, Women's Empowerment, and Legal Literacy. Additionally, she is a founding member of WECANB Global, an organization dedicated to empowering women and addressing gender inequality through media discussions. Apart from her legal academic pursuits, Prof. Suman is an accomplished artist with a passion for Indian Folk Art. Her artwork, themed around Krishna Leela, Ram Sabha, motherhood, and Indian culture, has been well-received and sold via her social media art page 'tulipzcreations.'

**Mobile No:** 8763684305

**Email:** tulip.suman@kls.ac.in

**Co-Author**

**Rajashree Ghosh** is a third-year B.A. LL.B. (Hons) student at KIIT School of Law, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, with a strong academic record. Her areas of interest span Intellectual Property Law, International Law, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Technology Law, and Environmental Law.

*Rajashree has demonstrated exceptional research acumen through multiple publications, including a discussion paper on social issues such as comparative maternity benefits of emerging developing nations, and contributions to case compilations on Public Interest Litigation and Constitutional Law. She has also presented research papers at prestigious national and international conferences, addressing contemporary issues in constitutional law, intellectual property, artificial intelligence and data privacy, international humanitarian law, women's studies, gender justice, sustainability, and healthcare governance.*

*Beyond academics, she actively participates in moot court competitions, ADR exercises, and socio-legal advocacy initiatives. She serves as Assistant Coordinator for Kamakshi & HeforShe at KSAC and is a member of the Legal Aid Clinic. Additionally, Rajashree is an accomplished Odissi dancer, having completed her Visharad with distinction and secured second place at the International Festival of Dance and Music in Bali, Indonesia.*

**Mobile No:** 7008624328

**Email:** 2383085@kls.ac.in

## Towards A Swadeshi Jurisprudence: The Quest for India's Legal Swaraj

ADV. Aishwarya Sunil Korde  
Associate of Tax and Customs

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### Abstract

*The Indian courtroom presents a profound paradox: a sovereign nation-state whose foundational concepts of law remain tethered to its colonial past. Over seven decades after political independence, India's legal machinery from the adversarial procedures and English-language primacy to the colonial-era codes-operates within a framework designed for **imperial control**, not citizen welfare. This creates a fundamental disconnect between India's ancient **civilizational ethos** and its contemporary legal practice. Crucially, this imposition was a deliberate **erasure**. Pre-colonial India possessed sophisticated, community-centric justice systems, like the village **panchayat**, animated by core philosophical principles. These included **Dharma** (righteous conduct and moral law), **Satya** (truth-seeking), and **Lokmangal** (public welfare). Philosophical schools like **Nyaya** (logic/epistemology) and **Mimamsa** (interpretation) provided the intellectual architecture for rigorous legal reasoning. The colonial project systematically dismantled this indigenous jurisprudence through intellectual, structural, and legal supersession.*

*This paper argues that true **Swaraj** (self-rule) is incomplete without **jurisprudential sovereignty**. The path forward is the conscious development of a **Swadeshi Jurisprudence**. This is not a regressive rejection but a **critical synthesis**: fusing the robustness of the modern Constitution with the ethical depth and restorative ideals of indigenous thought.*

*Achieving this requires a concrete blueprint: reforming legal education to center **Indian** legal philosophy, providing **mandatory training** to judges and lawyers in indigenous ethical reasoning and logic, and **strengthening community justice** mechanisms to reflect the principles of dialogue and reconciliation. Only this transformation-shifting the legal system's substance from conflict-driven technicality to truth-seeking and social harmony-can forge a truly just and authentically Indian republic of law.*

**Keywords:** *Jurisprudential Decolonization, Indigenous Legal Systems, Dharma and Nyaya, Swadeshi Jurisprudence, Constitutional Cultural Integration.*

## Introduction: The Unfinished Independence

More than seventy years after independence, India faces an uncomfortable truth. While we govern ourselves politically, our legal system still speaks in a foreign accent. Walk into any High Court today, and you'll see judges in black robes borrowed from Britain, proceedings conducted in English, and a courtroom atmosphere that would feel familiar to a 19th-century colonial administrator.<sup>317</sup> This isn't just about aesthetics. It's about a deeper disconnect between how Indians understand justice and how our courts deliver it. This paper argues that true self-rule—what Gandhi called *Swaraj*—remains incomplete without legal sovereignty. We need what I call “Swadeshi Jurisprudence”: a legal system that draws from India's own intellectual traditions while maintaining modern constitutional safeguards.

## Part I: Understanding the Colonial Inheritance

### The System That Wasn't Built for Us

The foundation of Indian law rests on three pillars erected in the 1860s: the Code of Civil Procedure, the Indian Penal Code, and the Indian Evidence Act.<sup>318</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay and his colleagues designed these codes with a specific purpose—not to deliver justice to Indians, but to govern them efficiently. Think about it from the British perspective. How do you control a vast, diverse population whose languages and customs you don't understand? You create a uniform, rigid legal system that doesn't require local knowledge. You make it run on written codes that can be administered from a distance. You minimize the judge's role in seeking truth and maximize procedural rules that anyone can follow mechanically.

**Table 1: Colonial vs. Indigenous Justice Systems**

Aspect	Colonial System	Traditional Indian System
Primary Goal	Administrative control, efficient governance	Social harmony, restoration of dharma
Language	English (alien to most Indians)	Local languages
Decision-maker	British-trained judge (outsider)	Village elders (community members)

<sup>317</sup> Marc Galanter, “The Aborted Restoration of ‘Indigenous’ Law in India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14, no. 1 (1972): 53-70

<sup>318</sup> The Code of Civil Procedure was first enacted in 1859 and revised in 1908; the Indian Penal Code came into force in 1860; the Indian Evidence Act in 1872. See Hari Singh Gour, *The Penal Law of India*, 11th ed. (Delhi: Law Publishers, 1982).

<b>Process</b>	Adversarial combat between lawyers	Dialogue and consensus-building
<b>Focus</b>	Procedural correctness	Substantive truth and justice
<b>Cost</b>	Expensive, formal courts	Accessible, community-based
<b>Outcome</b>	Winner vs. loser verdict	Reconciliation and social repair

This table reveals something striking: almost every feature of the colonial system served colonial interests, not Indian welfare. The adversarial system, where two lawyers fight it out while the judge watches passively, assumes both sides have equal resources. But when the state prosecutes a poor farmer, where’s the equality?  
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### The Adversarial Problem

The adversarial system treats every case as a battle. Victory goes not necessarily to the truthful party, but to whoever presents the better argument or can afford the better lawyer. The judge’s job isn’t to discover what actually happened—it’s to see if the prosecution proved its case “beyond reasonable doubt.”<sup>320</sup>

This creates absurd situations. A guilty person might walk free because of a procedural error. An innocent person might be convicted because they couldn’t afford good legal representation. The system prioritizes proof over truth, winning over justice. Compare this to traditional Indian approaches, which saw disputes as disruptions to community harmony. The goal wasn’t to declare a winner and loser—it was to uncover the truth and heal relationships. As we’ll see, this wasn’t primitive or unsophisticated. It was rooted in complex philosophical traditions.

### How We Lost Our Legal Voice

The British didn’t just impose their system—they actively destroyed ours. This happened through three coordinated attacks:

#### 1. The Intellectual Attack

British administrators systematically portrayed Indian legal traditions as backward and chaotic. Henry Maine called ancient Indian law “an apparatus of cruel absurdities.” James Mill dismissed indigenous laws as “a disorderly compilation of loose, vague, stupid, or unintelligible quotations.”<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Crisis of the Indian Legal System* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), 45-67.

<sup>320</sup> S. M. Sherry and A. R. Blackshield, “The Criminal Justice System in India: A Critique,” *Journal of Indian Law Institute* 22, no. 3 (1980): 401-428

<sup>321</sup> Quoted in Bernard S. Cohn, “Law and the Colonial State in India,” *History and Power in the Study of Law: New Directions in Legal Anthropology*, ed. June Starr and Jane F. Collier (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 131-152

The most devastating blow came from Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education." He declared that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."<sup>322</sup> This wasn't just about books—it was about creating "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" who would run the colonial legal system and believe in its superiority.<sup>323</sup>

## 2. The Structural Attack

Before the British, villages largely governed themselves through *panchayats*—councils of respected elders who resolved disputes using local customs and consensus.<sup>324</sup> These weren't informal gatherings. They had real authority, backed by community enforcement.

The British destroyed this system through land revenue reforms. The Permanent Settlement and Ryotwari systems replaced communal land rights with private property and made individuals directly accountable to the colonial state.<sup>325</sup> When land disputes had to go to British courts instead of village councils, the *panchayats* lost their power and relevance. Their economic base collapsed, and with it, their authority.

## 3. The Feedback Loop

Here's where it gets insidious. The English-educated Indians created by Macaulay's education system naturally filled positions in the new British courts. They had been taught that Indian traditions were backward, so they saw no value in preserving *panchayats*. Meanwhile, as *panchayats* weakened, people were forced into formal courts, which seemed to validate the entire colonial system. Success bred more success, erasure bred more erasure.

This created a self-reinforcing cycle that continues today. The alienation we feel from our own legal system isn't accidental—it was engineered.

## Part II: What We Lost—India's Philosophical Foundations

To understand what British colonialism erased, we need to recover India's intellectual tradition of law. This wasn't primitive folklore. It was sophisticated jurisprudence that rivals anything in the Western tradition.

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<sup>322</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education" (1835), in *Macaulay: Prose and Poetry*, ed. G. M. Young (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 721-729.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>324</sup> A. M. Shah, "Panchayat Justice: An Aspect of Village Organization in Gujarat and Rajasthan," in *Caste and Social Stratification among the Muslims*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad (Delhi: Manohar, 1973), 125-156

<sup>325</sup> Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, trans. J. D. M. Derrett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 3-15.

## Dharma: The Ethical Framework

At the heart of Indian legal thought lies *dharma*—a concept far richer than its common translation as “religion” or “duty.” Dharma comes from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, meaning “to uphold” or “to sustain.”<sup>326</sup> It represents the moral and cosmic order that holds society together.

### In legal terms, dharma had several layers:

- **Universal duties** (*sādhāraṇa-dharma*): truthfulness, non-violence, self-control—applicable to everyone
- **Specific duties** (*svadharma*): responsibilities based on one’s role in society
- **Royal duty** (*rājadharmā*): the king’s obligation to protect subjects and uphold justice<sup>327</sup>

Here’s what matters most: dharma applied especially to rulers. Kings weren’t above the law—they were its primary servants. The *Arthashastra* and *Mahabharata* are explicit: a king who violates dharma loses his right to rule and can be removed.<sup>328</sup>

This is indigenous rule of law. Not rule *by* law (where the sovereign uses law as a tool), but rule *of* law (where even sovereigns bow to a higher moral order).

## Satya and Lokmangal: The Goals of Justice

Traditional Indian jurisprudence aimed at two ultimate goals:

**Satya (Truth):** Not just factual accuracy, but deeper truth—understanding what really happened and what justice requires. The famous phrase “*Satyameva Jayate*” (Truth alone triumphs) wasn’t aspirational—it was operational. Courts were supposed to actively seek truth, not just passively referee between two competing stories.<sup>329</sup>

**Lokmangal (Public Welfare):** Justice wasn’t an end in itself but a means to social well-being. Kautilya wrote: “In the happiness of his subjects lies the King’s happiness; in their welfare his welfare.”<sup>330</sup> Decisions had to consider community impact and contribute to social harmony.

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<sup>326</sup> P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. 3 (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1946), 1-38

<sup>327</sup> Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, ed. and trans. L. N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992), Book 1, Chapter 4

<sup>328</sup> The Mundaka Upanishad (3.1.6) states “*Satyameva Jayate*,” which became India’s national motto

<sup>329</sup> Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, Book 1, Chapter 19.

<sup>330</sup> Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Nyaya Theory of Knowledge: A Critical Study of Some Problems of Logic and Metaphysics* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 5-42

## The Philosophical Engines: Nyaya and Mimamsa

Two schools of Indian philosophy provided the intellectual machinery for legal reasoning:

**Nyaya (Logic and Epistemology):** This school developed rigorous methods for acquiring valid knowledge through perception, inference, comparison, and testimony<sup>331</sup>. It created a sophisticated system of argumentation, including a five-step syllogism and a detailed classification of logical fallacies. This wasn't religious mysticism—it was systematic logic that structured how evidence was evaluated and arguments were constructed.

**Mimamsa (Textual Interpretation):** Originally developed to interpret Vedic texts, Mimamsa created interpretive principles so logical and universal that they were applied to legal texts as well.<sup>332</sup> How do you resolve conflicting rules? How do you determine legislative intent? Mimamsa had answers—answers that functioned much like modern principles of statutory interpretation.

The existence of these schools proves something crucial: pre-colonial India didn't just have laws; it had a meta-discourse *about* law. It had jurisprudence.

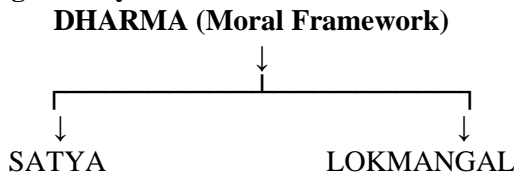
## Justice in Action: The Village Panchayat

These philosophical principles weren't abstract—they shaped how justice actually worked. The village panchayat embodied dharma, satya, and lokmangal in practice.<sup>333</sup>

When a dispute arose, village elders didn't hold an adversarial trial. They facilitated dialogue between parties, conducted proceedings in the local language, and sought consensus. Their authority came not from state coercion but from community respect and social pressure to comply.<sup>334</sup>

The goal was restoration, not punishment. If someone stole because of poverty, the solution might involve ensuring they had adequate livelihood—addressing the root cause, not just punishing the symptom. This approach saw disputes as social wounds to be healed, not individual crimes to be avenged.

## Figure 1: The Integrated System of Traditional Indian Justice

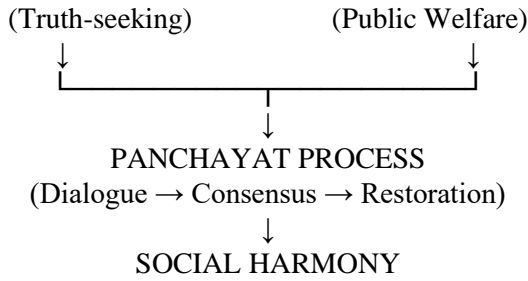


<sup>331</sup> Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, *Ślokavārttika*, trans. Gaṅgānātha Jhā (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1907), introduction.

<sup>332</sup> M. P. Jain, *Outlines of Indian Legal History*, 5th ed. (Bombay: N. M. Tripathi, 1990), 15-28

<sup>333</sup> Shah, "Panchayat Justice," 140-142.

<sup>334</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938).



### Part III: Building Swadeshi Jurisprudence

#### What Is Swadeshi Jurisprudence?

*Swadeshi* means “of one’s own country.” During the independence movement, it represented more than economic self-reliance—it was a philosophy of authenticity and self-respect<sup>335</sup>. Gandhi defined it as “that spirit which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.”

<sup>336</sup>

**Swadeshi Jurisprudence is the application of this principle to law.** It means:

- Grounding India’s Constitution in Indian philosophical wisdom
- Interpreting constitutional values—justice, liberty, equality—through concepts like dharma, satya, and lokmangal
- Creating a hybrid system: modern constitutional structure + indigenous ethical foundation
- Producing judges who can think in both Western legal terms and Indian philosophical categories

Let me be clear: This is *not* about replacing the Constitution with the Manusmriti. The Constitution remains supreme. But we can interpret and apply it through an Indian philosophical lens rather than purely through Western jurisprudential categories.

#### Addressing Valid Concerns

Concern 1: Won’t ancient texts perpetuate caste and gender inequality?

This is the most serious objection. Yes, texts like the Manusmriti contain hierarchical and patriarchal elements incompatible with constitutional values.

The answer is critical, selective engagement. Indian philosophy is diverse, containing multiple streams—many profoundly egalitarian. <sup>337</sup>We’re not importing ancient laws wholesale. We’re extracting universal ethical principles (truth, duty, welfare, reconciliation) and using them to interpret modern rights.

<sup>335</sup> M. K. Gandhi, “The Swadeshi Vow,” *Young India*, March 17, 1927

<sup>336</sup> Werner Menski, *Hindu Law: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 234-267

<sup>337</sup> Rajeev Bhargava, ed., *Secularism and Its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1-30.

For example: Article 21's right to life can be read expansively through the lens of *lok mangal* (public welfare). Natural justice principles can be enriched by Nyaya logic. We take the methodology, not the medieval social prescriptions.

Concern 2: Won't this impose Hindu majoritarianism?

India is pluralistic. Any jurisprudence must respect diverse personal laws and customs. The solution: focus on universalizable ethical principles within Indian thought—truth, non-violence, compassion, duty—rather than specific religious doctrines<sup>338</sup>. These principles transcend particular traditions.

Concern 3: Is this practical?

Yes, through systematic implementation, as outlined below.

## Blueprint for Reform

Reform must happen at three levels simultaneously:

### 1. Legal Education (Long-term)

Restructure law school curricula to make Indian jurisprudence mandatory:

- **Core courses:** Dharmaśāstra, Arthaśāstra, Nyaya logic, Mimamsa interpretation
- **Comparative approach:** Teach alongside Western jurisprudence, not instead of it
- **Outcome:** “Intellectually bilingual” lawyers fluent in both common law and indigenous traditions<sup>339</sup>

### 2. Judicial Training (Medium-term)

Mandatory training programs for sitting judges and lawyers:

- Ethical decision-making through dharma framework
- Argumentation skills using Nyaya principles
- Interpretive methods from Mimamsa for statutory construction
- **Outcome:** Current practitioners equipped with new analytical tools<sup>340</sup>

### 3. Community Justice (Immediate)

Strengthen and expand Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR):

- Empower Lok Adalats with indigenous principles
- Train mediators in dialogue, consensus-building, and restorative approaches
- Allow consideration of local customs (within constitutional limits)
- **Outcome:** Accessible, culturally resonant justice at grassroots level<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> N. R. Madhava Menon, “Indian Legal Education: A Case for Reforms and Innovation,” *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 45, no. 3 (2003): 352-375

<sup>339</sup> Shimon Shetreet and Jules Deschênes, eds., *Judicial Independence: The Contemporary Debate* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), 401-425

<sup>340</sup> Jayanth K. Krishnan, “Social Policy Advocacy and the Role of Courts in India,” *American Asian Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 91-124

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid* 24

**Table 2: The Synergistic Reform Strategy**

<b>Reform Level</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Connection to Other Levels</b>
Legal Education	Long-term (15-20 years)	Future lawyers/judges	Ideological foundation shift	Graduates will staff community justice systems and advocate for indigenous approaches
Judicial Training	Medium-term (5-10 years)	Current practitioners	Enhanced interpretive tools	Trained judiciary more likely to uphold community justice decisions
Community Justice	Immediate (1-3 years)	Citizens	Accessible resolution of disputes	Success creates demand for education/training in indigenous methods

These three levels create a virtuous cycle. Reformed law schools produce graduates motivated to serve in community justice systems. A trained judiciary respects and integrates community decisions. Successful community forums generate public demand for more indigenous legal education. Change at each level reinforces change at the others.

### **The Deeper Political Question**

Swadeshi Jurisprudence connects to Gandhi’s vision of *Swaraj*—not just political independence but comprehensive self-governance.<sup>342</sup> Gandhi’s ideal was decentralized *panchayat raj*, with power residing in village republics.

Here’s the challenge: True indigenous jurisprudence, with its emphasis on community justice and dharma over state law, would require significant devolution of power from the centralized state back to communities. This poses a fundamental question to the modern Indian state, which inherited the Raj’s centralized structure. Can a state built on colonial architecture accommodate a genuinely indigenous jurisprudence? Or does real legal decolonization require reimagining the state itself?

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<sup>342</sup> Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, chapters 4-9.

## Conclusion: Completing the Journey

A) India achieved political independence in 1947. But our legal system still carries the DNA of colonial rule- not just in its codes and procedures, but in its entire philosophical orientation.

The colonial system was designed to control us, not serve us. It prioritizes procedural correctness over substantive truth, adversarial combat over consensus, and uniform rigidity over contextual flexibility. Most fundamentally, it feels alien because it *is* alien.

We had our own jurisprudence sophisticated, philosophically grounded, community-centered. We lost it through a deliberate colonial assault: intellectual (delegitimizing our traditions), structural (destroying our institutions), and self-reinforcing (creating a native elite that perpetuated the system).

Swadeshi Jurisprudence offers a path forward. Not naive revivalism, but creative synthesis: the modern Constitution's structure infused with dharma's ethics, satya's commitment to truth, and lokmangal's focus on public welfare.

### This isn't easy. It requires:

- Reforming legal education to teach Indian jurisprudence
- Training current practitioners in indigenous legal reasoning
- Empowering community-based justice mechanisms
- Wrestling with hard questions about tradition, modernity, and power

But it's necessary. True Swaraj - complete self-rule - demands legal sovereignty. We need a system where justice isn't imposed from above by an alienating elite, but emerges from our own civilizational values.

The freedom struggle isn't finished. The next phase is jurisprudential: building a republic of law that is authentically, wholly Indian.

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### **Brief Profile of the Author**

Rooted in a deep commitment to India's civilizational thought, **Adv. Aishwarya Korde** approaches law not merely as a profession but as an intellectual pursuit of justice, identity, and sovereignty. She is enrolled with the Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa and currently practises in the domains of taxation, customs, and commercial litigation. A graduate of Maharashtra National Law University (B.A., LL.B. Hons.), she combines rigorous legal training with a keen interest in public policy, governance, and indigenous knowledge systems.

Her academic work frequently explores the intersections of constitutionalism, civilizational history, and decolonial legal thought. She has authored essays and research pieces on judicial reform, foreign policy, and Sanātan jurisprudence. As a Fellow engaged in the study of indigenous legal orders, she is committed to shaping scholarship that re-centres Bharatiya perspectives. Her current research, *“Towards a Swadeshi Jurisprudence: The Quest for India's Legal Swaraj,”* furthers this endeavour.

## Indian Jurisprudence with Special Reference to the Bhagavat Gita and its Comparison with Western Jurisprudence

**Krishna Kumar**

*LLM (2023-2025), BALLB (2018-2023)*

*Banaras Hindu University*

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter deals with the jurisprudential foundations of the Bhagavad Gita and its comparison with Western jurisprudence. The ocean of Knowledge, i.e., the Bhagwat Geeta, is not limited to spirituality; its relevance can be seen in almost every sphere of life, including science, physiology, sociology, law, economics, and criminology. The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita can be applied to explain deviant and criminal behaviour of people, as well as the ways to control such behaviour. The text of the Bhagavad Gita can be extended to provide insight into the jurisprudential foundations of various schools of jurisprudence. There is a similarity between the natural school of jurisprudence and the Bhagavat Gita. Additionally, the deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant are reflected in the text of the Bhagavad Gita. Besides these, the teleological jurisprudence of Aristotle is also reflected in various texts of the Bhagavat Gita. There is a deeper connection between duty-based (or value-based) jurisprudence and the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita text emphasised both teleological and deontological approaches, along with value-based jurisprudence, which is similar to the notion of censorial jurisprudence.*

**Keywords:** *Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics, Teleological Ethics, Bhagavad Gita, Natural Law School of Jurisprudence, Deviant Behaviour, Duty-based Jurisprudence.*

### **I. Bhagavad Gita and Natural Law School of Jurisprudence**

There is a deeper connection between the natural law school of jurisprudence and the Bhagavad Gita, both of which reject the notion that unjust laws can be considered legitimate. During the era of natural law school of jurisprudence, law was considered a branch of justice and morality, and these two concepts were inseparable. The same view is also reflected if we see law as a dharma. The natural law school of jurisprudence emphasised that the ‘law as it is’ should conform with what the ‘law ought to be’. Law ‘as ought to be’, prioritises moral values such as

justice and morality. They do not consider an unjust law as law.<sup>343</sup> For example, Augustine stated that an unjust law is not a law : ‘*Nam mihi lex esse non videtur, quae justa non fuerit.*’<sup>344</sup> Therefore, justness can’t be separated from the law, i.e, there can’t be separation between law and morality or between ‘law as it ought to be’ and the ‘law as it is’. The same notion is also reflected in the Bhagavad Gita, where Lord Krishna emphasises doing the right things irrespective of the consequences. What is right should always be done. One should always strive to cultivate divine qualities, not demonic ones. It is not wrong to say that the Gita emphasised doing the right things, and what is right should always be done<sup>345</sup>.

Therefore, there should be no difference between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ as per the Bhagavad Gita. Aristotle, a jurist of the classical natural school of jurisprudence, is recognised for his teleological approach to jurisprudence. Aristotle’s teleological jurisprudence is also reflected in Chapter sixteen of the Bhagavad Gita. Aristotle propounded a virtue-based theory of justice and argued that the good is before the right. Aristotle’s teleological jurisprudence emphasised that we first need to define what goods are and then create laws to promote them. Aristotle thought that everything in the universe is guided by a purpose, and the purpose is to realise one’s true potential. Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita also emphasised that people should strive to cultivate divine qualities and promote them by acting in the mode of goodness. Lord Krishna in text 2.45 of the Bhagavad Gita asks Arjun to be established in the self by becoming transcendental to the three modes of nature. Texts 18.51 to 18.53 of the Bhagavad Gita state how one is elevated to the position of self-realisation.<sup>346</sup>

To attain one’s true potential, Aristotle says that we have a duty to inculcate good qualities like virtue, tolerance, wisdom, salvation, etc. Similarly, Lord Krishna in chapter 16 of the Bhagavad Gita, states that we need to inculcate the following divine qualities for the well-being of society as well as human beings: “Courage, self-control, kindness, the act of sacrifice, simplicity, a commitment to non-violence, honesty, absence of anger, detachment, inner peace, a reluctance to criticize, compassion for all beings, lack of jealousy, purification of one’s soul,

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<sup>343</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 96, a. 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981).

<sup>344</sup> St. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, Book 1, ch. 5, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993).

<sup>345</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 18.9, trans. and commentary by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Mumbai: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1986)

<sup>346</sup> Text 18.51- 18.53 of Bhagavad Gita states “ being purified by his intelligence and controlling the mind with determination, giving up the objects of sense gratifications, being freed from attachment and hatred , one who lives in a secluded place, who eats little, who controls his body , mind and power of speech , who is always in trance and who is detached, free from false ego, false pride, lust and anger, and acceptance of material things, free from false proprietorship and peaceful – such a person is certainly elevated to the position of self-realization.

gentleness, humility, unwavering resolve, energy, forgiveness, resilience, cleanliness, pursuit of spiritual wisdom, freedom from envy, study of the Vedas, and detachment from the desire for recognition collectively foster a harmonious and virtuous existence.”<sup>347</sup> These qualities are more numerous and broader than Aristotle’s virtues that one needs to cultivate in life. Therefore, the teleological notion is also reflected in the Gita.

The natural law school of jurisprudence also believes in the rationality of human beings, as it supports duties based on reason, rationality, and purpose. The 20th-century premier philosopher of natural law, jurists such as Rawls, Nozick, and Dworkin believed that humans are endowed with rationality. Human beings themselves are aware of what is good or bad for them. States should not need to teach them what the right things to do are. However, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume both believed that Human beings are slaves of their desires and passions. Therefore, they need to be taught by the state what is good or bad for them. Similarly, the Bhagavat Gita also supports the notion that human beings are rational.<sup>348</sup> For example, Text 6.5 of the Bhagavat Gita states, “One should uplift himself using his intellect rather than diminish himself. The mind can serve as both a companion and an adversary to the conditioned soul(human being).”<sup>349</sup>

Further text 6.6 of the Bhagavat Gita states, “ for him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but those who have failed to do so, his mind will remain the greatest enemy.”<sup>350</sup> Therefore, the Gita also accommodates the notion of rationality as presented by Rawls, Nozick, and Dworkin; at the same time, it also accommodates the thinking of David Hume and Thomas Hobbes, who believe that human beings are slaves to their passions and desires. As Text 2.60 of the Bhagavad Gita states, the senses are so powerful and strong that they can forcibly carry away the mind, even that of a discerning individual who is trying to control them.<sup>351</sup> Furthermore, Text 2.67 of the Bhagavad Gita also states that just as a powerful wind carries a boat across the river, even a single roaming sense can sweep away a person’s intelligence.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, chap. 16, trans. and commentary by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Mumbai: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1986)

<sup>348</sup> Text 18.30 of the Bhagavat Gita states, “that understanding by which one knows what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what is binding and what is liberating, is in the mode of goodness.”

<sup>349</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 6.5.

<sup>350</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 6.6

<sup>351</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.60

<sup>352</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.67

## II. Bhagavat Gita and Deontological Ethics of Immanuel Kant

The eminent jurist Immanuel Kant believed that true knowledge can exist without experience (empiricism). For example, Professor W Friedmann states, “the Copernican turn which Kant gave to philosophy was to replace the psychological and empirical method by the critical method, by an attempt to base the rational character of life and the world not on the observation of facts and matter but on the human consciousness itself. This he did by systematic inquiry into the functions of human reason.”<sup>353</sup> Kant opposed the notion that David Hume proposed, which states that we are slaves to our desires and passions. Kant believed that we can act freely without being slaves to our desires and passions. The Bhagavad Gita also focuses on human consciousness and emphasises that we can control our senses and desires by practising to be in the mode of goodness.

For example, Text 2.58 of the Bhagavat Gita states that a person who can retract their senses from the sense objects, much like a tortoise pulls its limbs into its shell, is firmly established in true consciousness.<sup>354</sup> Further, Text 6.4 of the Bhagavat Gita states, “A person is considered to be elevated in yoga when they have given up all material desires, no longer act for sensory pleasures, and do not partake in activities driven by the desire for results.”<sup>355</sup> Lord Krishna also emphasised that one should act with the help of their mind and not let themselves degrade. Because one who has conquered the mind has the mind as their best friend; those who have failed to control it have the mind as their greatest enemy.<sup>356</sup> Bhagavat Gita emphasised that one who has conquered his mind has attained tranquillity, and to such a man happiness and distress, heat and cold, honour and dishonour are all the same.<sup>357</sup>

Immanuel Kant’s deontology holds that one should act autonomously, not heteronomously, and also that one should act out of duty, rather than inclination. Acting autonomously means acting without being slaves to our senses. Acting out of duty, not out of inclination, means one should perform one’s duty for the sake of duty itself. One should perform their duty not for the results it brings, nor for personal motives, but because performing one’s duty is inherently good. Therefore, as per Kantian philosophy, one should perform one’s duty for the sake of duty itself.<sup>358</sup> For example, Professor Raymond Wacks commented that “for Kant, the only valid justifications for doing the right things were that you were under a duty to do so. This is the essence of deontology. When you act from other motives, you

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<sup>353</sup> W. Friedmann, *Legal Theory*, 5th ed. (New Delhi: Universal Law Publications, 2016), 157–58

<sup>354</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.58

<sup>355</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 6.4

<sup>356</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 6.6

<sup>357</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 6.7

<sup>358</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. and ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 394–96.

are not acting morally.”<sup>359</sup> This doctrine of deontology is also reflected in the Bhagavat Gita. Text 18.6 of the Bhagavat Gita states that all activities should be performed without attachment or any expectations of result.<sup>360</sup> Promoting such duties, Lord Krishna, in text 18.9 of the Bhagavad Gita, states that when a person fulfils his prescribed responsibilities solely out of duty, without any attachment to material associations or the outcomes, their renunciation is considered to be in the mode of goodness.<sup>361</sup> In text 2.48 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna asks us to perform our duty, equipoised, without attachment to success or failure.<sup>362</sup> Also, text 2.47 of the Bhagavad Gita states that we have the right to perform our prescribed duties, but we do not have a right to the fruits of our actions.<sup>363</sup> Lord Krishna, in text 18.7 of the Bhagavad Gita, emphasised that one should never renounce one's prescribed duties.<sup>364</sup> Therefore, the Bhagavat Gita also emphasised performing our duty for the sake of duty only, not for the fruitive result. In this way, Kantian jurisprudence, particularly deontology, is reflected in the text of the Bhagavad Gita. Unlike Bentham, who worried about the consequences and advocated that we need to perform a Utilitarian Calculation before taking action, Bhagavad opposes such a notion. For example, in text 2.38 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna instructs Arjuna to engage in battle solely for the sake of the fight itself (doing duty for the sake of duty alone), without worrying about happiness or sorrow, loss or gain, or the outcome of victory or defeat.<sup>365</sup>

### III. Bhagvat Gita and Analytical Positivism

The father of western jurisprudence, i.e, Jeremy Bentham, has divided the entire jurisprudence into two parts: the first is expository jurisprudence, which deals with law as it is, and the second is censorial jurisprudence, which deals with law as it ought to be. The notions of justice and morality are addressed under censorial jurisprudence, while positive law is addressed under expository jurisprudence. Western jurists, particularly positivists, believe that even an immoral law can be a law if it is made by the state. Therefore, as per positivism, even if the elements of censorial jurisprudence are not present in the expository jurisprudence, it will still be a valid law. For example, Austin famously stated that determining what the law is represents one issue, while evaluating its merits and shortcomings constitutes a separate matter.<sup>366</sup> As per positivism, what the ‘law is’ is a question of fact, and whether it is good or bad law is a question of morality or value, and the law has

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<sup>359</sup> Raymond Wacks, *Understanding Jurisprudence*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 255.

<sup>360</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 18.6

<sup>361</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 18.9

<sup>362</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.48

<sup>363</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.47

<sup>364</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 18.7

<sup>365</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.38

<sup>366</sup> John Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, ed. Wilfrid E. Rumble (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 157.

nothing to do with value (morality). But the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita place more emphasis on value. However, positivists do care about morality (value) under censorial jurisprudence. But their notion of morality is confined to the utilitarian calculation of ‘pain’ and ‘pleasure’, and providing maximum benefit to the maximum number of people. For example, under censorial jurisprudence, Bentham asks the legislature to make laws based on utilitarian calculations, but while listing the kinds of pain and pleasure, Bentham doesn’t focus on the quality of pleasure.<sup>367</sup> Professor NE Simmonds has rightly said that the primary concern of utilitarians is to maximise welfare; they do not care about how the welfare is distributed, and, therefore, if maximising overall human welfare can only be achieved by generating disparities in welfare, a utilitarian would prefer to aim for maximisation rather than an equal distribution.<sup>368</sup>

**Bentham lists the following 14 kinds of pleasures in his book *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* :**

The pleasures of sense, wealth, skill, amity, a good name, power, piety, benevolence, malevolence, memory, imagination, expectation, those dependent on association, and relief<sup>369</sup>. Therefore, even if an immoral bad act gives pleasure to the maximum number of people, then a utilitarian will consider such pleasure as good. However, in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna promotes divine qualities that bring divine pleasure to all and rejects demonic qualities and their associated pleasures. The Bhagavad Gita avoids demonic qualities and actions, even if they bring pleasure to many. Under Chapter sixteen of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna has mentioned 26 divine qualities that a person needs to inculcate: “Bravery, Purification of one's being, Development of spiritual wisdom, Generosity, Self-discipline, Engagement in Sacrifice, Study of the Vedas, Asceticism, Humility, Non-violence, Honesty, Absence of anger, Detachment, Calmness, Dislike for fault-finding, Kindness towards all living beings, Lack of envy, Softness, Modesty, Consistent resolve, Strength, Pardoning, Resilience, Cleanliness, Lack of jealousy, and Releasing the desire for recognition .”<sup>370</sup> At the same time, to lead a happy and prosperous life, lord Krishna mentioned that one needs to avoid the following demonic qualities, like Pride, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, and ignorance, securing money by illegal means, lust, anger, greed, false ego, horrible works, means to destroy the whole world, etc.<sup>371</sup> Therefore, the Bhagavad Gita rejects the

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<sup>367</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1823), 33

<sup>368</sup> N.E. Simmonds, *Central Issues in Jurisprudence: Justice, Law and Rights* (Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 1986), 16.

<sup>369</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1823), 33

<sup>370</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, chap. 16, trans. and commentary by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2006)

<sup>371</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, chap. 16, trans. and commentary by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Los Angeles: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2006)

utilitarian calculation of jurists of the Analytical School of Jurisprudence and emphasises a value-oriented, duty-based jurisprudence, which aligns more closely with the principles of jurists of the natural law school of jurisprudence.

#### **IV. Bhagvat Gita and Deviant Behaviour (Crime Causation)**

The following text, organised under different subheadings, explores how the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita can help explain the reasons behind deviant behaviour, including the commission of crimes or actions forbidden by scriptures or laws. Additionally, it suggests ways to prevent oneself from deviating from societal norms.

##### **i. Three Modes of Material Nature and Deviant Behaviour**

The Bhagavat Gita emphasised that the living being is the cause of various sufferings and enjoyments in this world.<sup>372</sup> Living entities become conditioned to the three modes of material nature. i.e., mode of goodness, mode of passion, and mode of ignorance.<sup>373</sup> Those in a mode of goodness are conditioned by a sense of happiness and knowledge.<sup>374</sup> People in the mode of goodness follow a deontological approach in life. They are not attached to the consequences or lack the desire for the outcome of their actions. They participate in these activities because they believe it is the right thing to do. They perform their prescribed duty for the sake of duty only. People in the mode of goodness possess divine qualities, as mentioned in Chapter 16 of the Bhagavad Gita. Therefore, they don't become deviant or criminal to society. For example, the Bhagavad Gita emphasised that the mode of goodness frees one from all sinful reactions.<sup>375</sup> Deviant activities are done by those who are situated in the mode of passion or by those in the mode of ignorance. The mode of passion is born out of unlimited desires and longings.<sup>376</sup> When there is an increase in the mode of passion, it brings about signs of strong attachment, active pursuits, relentless effort, and overwhelming desire and craving.<sup>377</sup> These desires can lead to deviance if they become uncontrollable or if they remain unfulfilled. Lord Krishna has stated that action performed in the mode of passion results in suffering and greed, while action performed in the mode of ignorance results in foolishness, madness, and illusion.<sup>378</sup> Those who are in a state of ignorance and passion are unable to control their senses, and they perform demonic activities that are forbidden by social norms or law. They do not know what to do or what not to do because their mind is bewildered by the sense enjoyment of lust, greed, and anger.

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<sup>372</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 13.21

<sup>373</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.27

<sup>374</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 14.6

<sup>375</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 14.6

<sup>376</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 14.7

<sup>377</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 14.12

<sup>378</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 14.16 – 14.17

## ii. Characteristics of a deviant person as reflected in the Bhagavat Gita.

A deviant person possesses the demonic qualities as mentioned in chapter 16 of the Bhagavat Gita. Lord Krishna has stated that pride, arrogance, conceit, anger, harshness, and ignorance belong to those of a demonic nature.<sup>379</sup> They don't know what to do and what not to do. Neither truth nor proper behaviour is found in them.<sup>380</sup> There is insatiable lust, false ego, and false prestige in themselves.<sup>381</sup> Furthermore, they believe that satisfying the senses is the prime requirement of a human being. Their anxiety is intense, driven by numerous desires, as well as lust and anger, and therefore, they acquire money through unlawful methods to satisfy their desires.<sup>382</sup> They are deluded by ignorance, considering themselves as powerful, rich, and perfect, and they want to earn more and more money, and they don't hesitate to kill anyone.<sup>383</sup> Motivated by the aforementioned characteristic, the individual engages in actions prohibited by scripture, societal norms, and the law, thereby becoming deviant.

## iii. Control of Senses and Deviant Behaviour

According to the Bhagavad Gita, we have five knowledge-acquiring senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin), five working senses (voice, legs, hands, anus, and genitals), and there are five objects of the senses, i.e., smell, taste, form, touch, and sound.<sup>384</sup> The Bhagavad Gita emphasises that the living being is the cause of various sufferings and enjoyments in this world.<sup>385</sup> We act according to the qualities that we acquire from the three material modes of nature. i.e, mode of passion, mode of ignorance, and mode of goodness.<sup>386</sup> Action performed in the mode of passion results in suffering and greed, while action performed in the mode of ignorance results in foolishness, madness, and illusion.<sup>387</sup> Those who act in a mode of goodness are able to control their senses, while those acting in the mode of passion and the mode of ignorance are not able to control their senses. Due to their uncontrollable senses, they become deviant. They do act in a manner forbidden by the scriptures.

## iv. Lust, Anger, Greed, and Deviant Behaviour

The Bhagavad Gita emphasises that the senses are so powerful that they forcibly seize the intellect, even in someone who is discerning and trying to control them.<sup>388</sup> When a person considers sensory objects, they begin to develop attachment to

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<sup>379</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 16.4

<sup>380</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 16.7

<sup>381</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 16.10

<sup>382</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 16.11 - 16.12

<sup>383</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 16.13 to 16.15

<sup>384</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 13.16 -13.17

<sup>385</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 13.21

<sup>386</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.5

<sup>387</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 14.16 – 14.17

<sup>388</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.60

them. This attachment can lead to lust, which in turn may give rise to anger.<sup>389</sup> The Bhagavat Gita emphasised that lust, anger, and greed are ways to hell<sup>390</sup>. Thus, lust, anger, and greed are responsible for deviant behaviour, and we may extend this notion to crime causation. The Bhagavad Gita emphasises that anger leads to complete delusion, which confuses memory. When memory is confused, intelligence is lost, resulting in downfall.<sup>391</sup> Thus, anger makes one lose intelligence (he can't judge whether what he is doing is either wrong or right). He loses self-control and acts in a manner prohibited by law or scripture. Many crimes are committed due to uncontrollable anger. Furthermore, the Bhagavad Gita highlights that lust arises from interaction with the material mode of passion and eventually turns into wrath, which becomes a powerful and destructive enemy to the world.<sup>392</sup> So lust is born when one entity reacts with the material mode of passion.

This lust developed into anger later on, which is responsible for the deviant behaviour as stated above. The Bhagavad Gita emphasises that the living beings are covered by different degrees of this lust<sup>393</sup>. Even the pure consciousness of wise living entities is covered by lust, which is never satisfied and which burns like fire.<sup>394</sup> Lust, like fire, is never satisfied. Lord Krishna emphasised that the senses, the mind, and the intelligence are the sitting place of this lust. Through them lust covers the living entity and bewilders him.<sup>395</sup> Therefore, lord Krishna emphasised controlling this great symbol of sin (lust) by regulating the senses, as it is a hindrance to Knowledge and self-realisation<sup>396</sup>. There are principles to regulate our attachment and aversion related to our senses and their objects. It's essential to resist being influenced by these feelings, as they can become obstacles on the path to self-realisation.<sup>397</sup> By inculcating the divine qualities and by acting in the mode of goodness, one can control this lust and save oneself from being deviant.

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<sup>389</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.62

<sup>390</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 16.21

<sup>391</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 2.63

<sup>392</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.37

<sup>393</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.38

<sup>394</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.39

<sup>395</sup> *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 3.40

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## Brief Profile of Author

**Krishna Kumar** is a legal scholar with a specialisation in jurisprudence. He has completed both his Master of Laws (LLM) program from 2023 to 2025 and his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws (BALLB) from 2018 to 2023 at Faculty of Law, Banaras Hindu University.

**Profile link** - (2) Krishna Kumar | LinkedIn

+918789840066

E-mail -kirshna.kumar@bhu.ac.in /  
ciaokrishna@gmail.com

## Indian Knowledge System and History

Dr. Sadhna Trivedi

Associate Professor of History  
FJS, Rama University, Kanpur UP

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### “Indian Knowledge System and History”

#### Abstract

*The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) reflects a vast and diverse tradition encompassing philosophy, science, art, governance, linguistics, and more, deeply embedded in India's civilizational ethos. This chapter explores the roots and evolution of the IKS through historical periods, from the Vedic age to modern times, highlighting contributions to science, education, polity, and holistic living. It also assesses the challenges faced during colonial rule and the ongoing efforts for revival in the post-independence era. This study examines the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) as an indigenous framework of education, science, philosophy, and culture, deeply rooted in India's civilizational history. It highlights the evolution of IKS from the Vedic era to the post-colonial period, analyzing its philosophical foundations, scientific achievements, and challenges under colonialism. The study further evaluates the efforts toward the revival of IKS in contemporary India, especially in education and policy-making.*

**Keywords:** *IKS, tradition, civilizational ethos, Post-independence era, post-colonial period.*

#### 1. Introduction

The Indian Knowledge System is not merely a collection of ancient texts or practices but a dynamic tradition of learning, inquiry, and innovation<sup>398</sup>. It reflects a holistic worldview, where the spiritual, material, and intellectual realms are integrated<sup>399</sup>. Historically, India has contributed significantly to world civilization in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, medicine, architecture, and linguistics<sup>400</sup>. India, one of the oldest continuous civilizations in the world, possesses a rich heritage of knowledge systems developed over thousands of

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<sup>398</sup> Kapil Kapoor, *Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2005), 23.

<sup>399</sup> Michel Danino, *The Indian Mind: Traditional and Modern Perspectives* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Foundation for Indian Culture, 2017), 17.

<sup>400</sup> Dharampal, *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* (Goa: Other India Press, 2000), 5–10.

years<sup>401</sup>. These systems are not limited to religious or spiritual traditions but encompass science, technology, linguistics, governance, medicine, and art<sup>402</sup>. Indian Knowledge System (IKS) reflects an integrative worldview that unites intellectual pursuit with ethical and spiritual dimensions<sup>403</sup>.

IKS, long marginalized during colonial rule, is now regaining recognition<sup>404</sup>. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a significant step towards incorporating traditional knowledge into mainstream education<sup>405</sup>.

## 2. Foundations of the Indian Knowledge System and Historical Background

### 2.1 The Vedas and Early Thought

The earliest codified body of Indian knowledge is found in the Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda), composed between 1500 and 500 BCE. These texts include hymns, rituals, cosmology, and philosophical inquiries<sup>406</sup>.

- Rigveda: Includes hymns that show early astronomical and natural understanding.
- Atharvaveda: Contains early knowledge of medicine and healing.

### 2.2 Vedāṅgas and Auxiliary Sciences

The Vedāṅgas (limbs of the Veda) include six disciplines that aided Vedic understanding: Śikṣā (phonetics), Vyākaraṇa (grammar), Chandas (prosody), Nirukta (etymology), Jyotiṣa (astronomy), and Kalpa (ritual). “Pāṇini’s *Aṣṭādhyāyī* represents one of the earliest and most systematic treatments of grammar in world linguistic traditions.”<sup>407</sup>

### 2.3 Vedic and Post-Vedic Era

The foundation of the IKS lies in the Vedic period (1500–500 BCE), where knowledge was orally transmitted through the śruti (heard) tradition. The four Vedas – Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda – laid the groundwork for Indian philosophy, cosmology, and ethics<sup>408</sup>.

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<sup>401</sup> Subhash Kak, “Indian Knowledge Systems and the Making of a Knowledge Society,” *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 27, no. 1 (2010): 1–10.

<sup>402</sup> Baldev Raj et al., *Science and Spirituality: A Global Perspective* (New Delhi: Vigyan Prasar, 2012), 42.

<sup>403</sup> G. Venkatasubbaiah, *Dimensions of Indian Thought* (Bangalore: Indian Institute of World Culture, 2001), 36.

<sup>404</sup> Kapil Kapoor, *Decolonising the Indian Mind* (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2007), 45.

<sup>405</sup> Government of India, National Education Policy 2020 (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 2020), 10–12.

<sup>406</sup> Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1:xxv–xxvii.

<sup>407</sup> A. B. Keith, *The Veda of the Black Yajus School* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914); George Cardona, *Pāṇini: A Survey of Research* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976).

<sup>408</sup> A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1954), 247–55; Stephanie Jamison and Michael Witzel, “Vedic Hinduism,” in *The Study of Hinduism*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 65–113.

Auxiliary disciplines, the Vedāngas, evolved to support Vedic interpretation<sup>409</sup>:

- Shiksha (phonetics)
- Vyākaraṇa (grammar)
- Jyotiṣa (astronomy)
- Kalpa (rituals)
- Nirukta (etymology)
- Chandas (prosody)

## 2.4 Classical Period (500 BCE – 1200 CE)

This era witnessed a blossoming of philosophical schools (Darśanas) – Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta. Texts like Panini’s Ashtadhyayi, Kautilya’s Arthashastra, Sushruta Samhita, and Charaka Samhita reflect India’s advancement in linguistics, political science, surgery, and medicine. Centers like *Takshashila*, *Nalanda*, and *Vikramashila* became global learning hubs, attracting scholars from China, Tibet, and Central Asia<sup>410</sup>.

## 2.5 Medieval Period (1200–1757 CE)

Despite foreign invasions and changing political contexts, knowledge traditions survived and evolved. Scholars like Al-Biruni translated Sanskrit texts into Arabic and Persian. Indigenous systems like Unani medicine were integrated with Ayurveda. Indian mathematics, astronomy, and metallurgy reached advanced stages during this period. Bhaskara II and Madhava of Sangamagrama made substantial contributions to calculus and trigonometry<sup>411</sup>.

## 3. Contributions to Science and Technology

### 3.1 Mathematics and Astronomy

“The Indian mathematical tradition significantly enriched global mathematics through the invention of the decimal place-value system, the conceptualization of zero, and systematic developments in arithmetic, algebra, and trigonometry.”<sup>412</sup>

- Aryabhata’s *Aryabhatiya* (499 CE) outlined the rotation of Earth, value of pi, and trigonometric functions.
- Bhaskara II’s *Siddhanta Shiromani* (12th century CE) further developed calculus-like concepts.

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<sup>409</sup> M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 1, trans. V. Srinivasa Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 270–85; Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Introduction.

<sup>410</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922)

<sup>411</sup> Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *History of Science and Technology in Ancient India*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1982).

<sup>412</sup> B. B. Datta and A. N. Singh, *History of Hindu Mathematics*, vol. 1 (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962); Kim Plofker, *Mathematics in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

### 3.2 Medicine and Health Sciences

- The *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* (circa 600 BCE–100 CE) are key Ayurvedic texts<sup>413</sup>.
- Sushruta is known as the ‘father of surgery’ for descriptions of surgical procedures and anatomy<sup>414</sup>.

### 3.3 Impact of Colonialism

The British colonial administration devalued traditional Indian education and replaced it with an Anglicized system. Macaulay’s Minute (1835) emphasized English education, undermining vernacular and Sanskrit-based learning. Thousands of Gurukulas and pathshalas were dismantled or neglected, and oral traditions faded. IKS was labeled as irrational or obsolete by colonial historians<sup>415</sup>. Colonial knowledge systems imposed Western frameworks, discrediting indigenous epistemologies, leading to an epistemic rupture<sup>416</sup>.

## 4. Post-Independence and Contemporary Revival

After 1947, India’s initial policies largely continued the colonial educational model. However, from the 1980s onwards, there was growing interest in reclaiming traditional knowledge<sup>417</sup>.

### 4.1 Institutional Efforts

- Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) have supported projects on IKS<sup>418</sup>.
- Ministry of Education’s IKS Division (2020) promotes research, documentation, and education rooted in Indian traditions<sup>419</sup>.
- Universities have introduced IKS courses in Ayurveda, Vastu, Sanskrit, Indian logic, and more<sup>420</sup>.

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<sup>413</sup> Priyavrat Sharma, *History of Medicine in India: From Antiquity to 1000 A.D.* (Delhi: Indian National Science Academy, 1992), 45–67.

<sup>414</sup> Girish Dwivedi and Shridhar Dwivedi, “Sushruta – the Clinician – Teacher par Excellence,” *Indian Journal of Chest Diseases and Allied Sciences* 49, no. 4 (2007): 243–46.

<sup>415</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>416</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>417</sup> Kapil Kapoor and Avadhesh Kumar Singh, eds., *Indian Knowledge Systems, Vol. 1* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2005)

<sup>418</sup> Indian Council of Historical Research, *Annual Report 2019–2020* (New Delhi: ICHR, 2020).

<sup>419</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of India, *Indian Knowledge Systems Division* (2020), <https://iksindia.org>.

<sup>420</sup> University Grants Commission (UGC), *Curriculum Framework and Credit System for Undergraduate Programmes with Focus on Indian Knowledge Systems* (New Delhi: UGC, 2022).

## 4.2 NEP 2020 and Future Vision

The *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*<sup>421</sup> emphasizes holistic education, multilingualism, and incorporation of IKS in curriculum. It encourages value-based education, experiential learning, and integration of yoga, arts, and environment studies with modern sciences<sup>422</sup>.

## 4.3 Epistemology and Philosophy

Indian epistemology (Pramāṇa) focuses on the means of knowledge acquisition: perception (pratyakṣa), inference (anumāna), comparison (upamāna), verbal testimony (śabda), and others. Philosophical systems like Nyāya, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Advaita Vedānta offered comprehensive frameworks for understanding reality and consciousness<sup>423</sup>.

## 5. Core Components of Indian Knowledge System

### 5.1 Epistemology (Pramāṇa)

Indian epistemology identifies valid sources of knowledge<sup>424</sup>:

- Pratyakṣa (perception)
- Anumāna (inference)
- Śabda (testimony)
- Upamāna (comparison)
- Arthāpatti (presumption)
- Anupalabdhi (non-cognition)

These were codified by Nyāya and Mimāṃsā scholars.

### 5.2 Education and Pedagogy

The *Gurukula system* emphasized personalized, value-based, and multidisciplinary education, blending physical, intellectual, and spiritual training. Learning was based on<sup>425</sup>:

- Memorization and oral debate (śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana)
- Discipleship and ethics (guru-śiṣya tradition)

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<sup>421</sup> Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

<sup>422</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of India, *National Education Policy 2020* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 2020), <https://www.education.gov.in/nep2020>.

<sup>423</sup> Karl H. Potter, ed., *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Vol. II, Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977)

<sup>424</sup> Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986)

<sup>425</sup> Radhakumud Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989)

### 5.3 Education and Knowledge Transmission

Ancient India had robust systems of education through Gurukulas and universities<sup>426</sup>.

- Takshashila and Nalanda were world-renowned centers of learning.
- Subjects taught included logic, medicine, arts, Buddhist studies, and Vedic literature.

### 6. Challenges in Reviving IKS

Reviving Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) faces multiple challenges, including fragmentation of sources, lack of systematic documentation, and limited integration with modern education.<sup>427</sup>

- Loss of manuscripts and oral traditions
- Lack of integration with modern research methodologies
- Misrepresentation of IKS as unscientific
- Shortage of trained scholars in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and classical Indian logic

There is a need for interdisciplinary research that bridges traditional insights with contemporary scientific paradigms.

### 6.1 Art, Architecture, and Aesthetics

The science of aesthetics (Rasa theory) was elaborated in *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharata Muni. Indian architecture, seen in temples, caves, and monuments like Sanchi and Konark, reflects geometrical and astronomical precision, encoded through traditional treatises like *Vastu Shastra*<sup>428</sup>.

### 7. Impact of Colonialism on IKS

Colonial rule disrupted India's traditional knowledge systems. British education policies marginalized indigenous learning and prioritized Western curriculum<sup>429</sup>.

- Thomas Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Indian Education promoted English education over vernacular systems.
- Many manuscripts and oral traditions were lost or devalued.

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<sup>426</sup> Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century* (Delhi: Pearson, 2008)

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<sup>428</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Temple: Its Meaning* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977).

<sup>429</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989)

## 8. Revival and Contemporary Relevance

Post-independence, there has been a growing movement to revive and integrate IKS into formal education<sup>430</sup>.

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020<sup>431</sup> emphasizes Indian epistemologies and traditional knowledge.
- Institutions like IITs and universities now promote Sanskrit computational linguistics, Ayurveda, and indigenous technologies.

## 9. Conclusion

The Indian Knowledge System is an enduring legacy of philosophical depth, scientific rigor, and holistic thinking. While it faced decline during colonialism, its revival holds the promise of contributing unique perspectives to global knowledge, especially in sustainability, wellness, and consciousness studies. The Indian Knowledge System is not a relic of the past but a living tradition with much to offer to the contemporary world. It advocates holistic well-being, sustainable living, and ethical inquiry. Reviving IKS requires not mere preservation but innovation, reinterpretation, and integration with modern education, policy, and research frameworks.

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### **Brief Profile of Author**

**Dr. Sadhna Trivedi** is an academician and researcher in the field of History with a strong foundation in historical studies. She obtained his B.A. and M.A. in History, followed by a from reputed universities in India. She completed her Ph.D. in History from C.S.J.M University, Kanpur UP, India. She establishing her credentials in higher education and research.

With over ten years of teaching and research experience across reputed universities, Dr. Trivedi has contributed significantly to the discipline of History. She is presently working as an Associate Professor (History) in FJS, Rama University, Kanpur, U.P. She has published more than 35 research articles in reputed national and international journals and authored of edited book, reflecting her diverse scholarly interests and commitment to advancing historical studies. His research engages with diverse themes of history and contributes meaningfully to academic discourse.

**Mob.** +91 9335705669

**E-mail** – drsadhnatrivedi24@gmail.com

## Indian Knowledge System & Taxation

**Dr. Pratima Soni**

*Assistant Professor of Law*

*ICFAI Law School, The ICFAI University, Jaipur*

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### **Abstract**

*The chapter "Indian Knowledge System & Taxation" examines the convergence of ancient Indian intellectual traditions with contemporary taxation structures. This analysis explores how the concepts inherent in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), especially those articulated in the Vedic texts and Arthashastra, provide significant insights for modern tax systems. The chapter starts with delineating the historical origins of taxation in India, beginning with the Vedic era, during which the principles of government and social responsibilities established the groundwork for primitive tax systems. The Arthashastra, written by Kautilya, is examined as a crucial text that combines taxes with social welfare, economic equilibrium, and equity. Kautilya's ideas underscore the significance of transparency, equality, and a progressive taxation system, ideals that persist in shaping India's contemporary tax framework. The chapter emphasizes the ethical aspects of taxes in IKS, referencing dharma (righteousness) and artha (prosperity) as fundamental principles that inform equitable government and taxation. It examines the relevance of these principles in constructing India's contemporary taxation framework, regulated by statutes such as the Income Tax Act and GST. The chapter examines how Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) may inform sustainable taxation policies that tackle current issues such as tax evasion, corruption, and inclusive development. It finishes by promoting the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems into contemporary tax education and administration, therefore enhancing a transparent, efficient, and morally sound tax system.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Taxation, Arthashastra, Dharma and Artha, Sustainable Development.*

### **1. Introduction**

The chapter "Indian Knowledge System & Taxation" looks at the important link between India's old ways of thinking and current tax systems. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a huge collection of philosophical concepts, economic theories, and beliefs about how to run a country that have shaped India's political, economic, and legal systems for hundreds of years. This chapter examines how ancient Indian wisdom, as expressed in seminal texts such as the Vedic scriptures, Arthashastra, and other classical works, provides significant insights for modern

taxation practices. The goal is to explain how these old ideas may help establish a tax system that fulfills the needs of today's society while still following moral, social, and ethical rules.<sup>432</sup> The concept of taxation has been a part of Indian culture since the early Vedic period. Even though these early approaches were rather basic compared to the ones we use today, they laid the groundwork for the ultimate creation of codified tax systems. Over time, this system got increasingly complicated, thanks in part to thinkers like Kautilya, whose book *Arthashastra* laid out the basics of running an economy, a government, and taxation. The ideas of dharma (righteousness or duty) and artha (prosperity) have had a big impact on the history of India's tax systems. These ideas regarded taxes as a method to gather money and help society and promote fair development.<sup>433</sup>

This chapter examines historical literature and concepts to elucidate the enduring influence of India's intellectual heritage, particularly the principles of justice, accountability, and transparency, on the modern Indian taxation system. These ethical frameworks are not only historical antiques; they provide tangible, lasting solutions to the persisting challenges of tax evasion, corruption, and social inequality that hinder the fair and efficient functioning of modern economies. This chapter posits that contemporary taxation systems in India need to reflect more social responsibility, justice, and sustainability by integrating traditional values. Integrating sustainability into the tax system is a way to deal with problems like economic injustice, environmental damage, and the growing financial strains of modern Indian society.

As India faces fast economic changes, environmental problems, and a complex social landscape, the Indian Knowledge System may provide a unique and comprehensive view of modern taxation. This chapter argues that the ideas of ancient India, when combined with modern ideas about tax administration, could help us solve some of the problems we have today and make sure that the tax system is fair and helps the country grow in the long run. This research underscores the lasting importance of ethical governance, rooted in traditional Indigenous Knowledge Systems, in formulating a taxation framework that meets the needs of a diverse and rapidly evolving population.<sup>434</sup>

## **2. Historical Evolution of Taxation in India**

### **2.1. Taxation in the Vedic Period**

The Vedic period marks the earliest recorded occurrences of taxation in India. The Vedas were largely about spirituality and knowledge, but they also laid the framework for government. The "rajan," or rulers, were in charge of protecting their people and making sure that justice was done. During this time, the initial

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<sup>432</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, trans. L.N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1992).

<sup>433</sup> Upendra Baxi, *The Future of Human Rights in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>434</sup> S.C. Dube, *Indian Society: Its Nature and Structure* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2006).

ideas about taxes were closely linked to dharma, which is the moral framework that governs social and religious duties. The Vedic texts, although not directly addressing tax collection, clarify the moral and civic duties of individuals, including contributions to societal welfare. In the Vedic world, taxes were considered as a way to keep society running, make sure people were doing well, and help the ruler run the country.

## **2.2. The Mauryan Era and Kautilya's Arthashastra**

The Arthashastra by Kautilya, which was composed during the Mauryan Empire, is an important book on Indian governance and taxes. Kautilya, or Chanakya, was an ancient Indian philosopher, economist, and strategist who wrote on government, law, and taxes in this book. The Arthashastra set clear rules for taxes, viewing them as a way to govern the economy and improve people's lives. Kautilya's approach emphasized the effectiveness and fairness of the tax system, advocating for a progressive tax model and ensuring a fair allocation of the tax burden across various segments of society.

Kautilya's ideas on taxes were based on dharma, which means the good of the people, and were closely related to artha, which means riches. He suggested that tax collection methods be simple, fair, and efficient so that no one had to pay too much. He also stressed how important it is for tax officials to be accountable, which is still true in Indian tax legislation today.<sup>435</sup>

## **2.3. Taxation during the Gupta Period and Other Classical Indian States**

The idea of taxation changed much more during the Gupta period. The Gupta Empire was rich, in part because it had a fair and efficient system of taxes. Taxes were more organized during this period, and revenue from land became more important. As the empire grew, taxes were used to pay for the military and government, as well as to fund the arts, education, and religious groups. The moral basis of governance was still based on the ideas of dharma, which made sure that taxes were collected in a manner that didn't take advantage of people and helped them.<sup>436</sup>

## **3. Core Concepts of Indian Knowledge System**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers profound insights into governance, ethics, and economic principles that have shaped India's social, political, and economic structures for millennia. The ideals of dharma (righteousness) and artha (prosperity) are at the heart of IKS. They form the moral and ethical underpinning for India's government and tax systems. These ideas are still important in today's governance, including the tax systems we have now. They provide ways to make sure that everyone in society is treated fairly, equally, and has a good life.

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<sup>435</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

<sup>436</sup> P.S. Kumar, "The Ethics of Taxation: Revisiting Kautilya's Arthashastra," *Journal of Indian Political Thought* 8, no. 2 (2020): 74-89.

### **3.1. The Role of Dharma (Righteousness) and Artha (Prosperity) in Governance**

Dharma and artha are not only ideas; they are also practical rules that shaped the polity of ancient India. Dharma, which is commonly thought of as doing the right thing or having a moral duty, was very important to how monarchs were expected to rule. In this context, governance meant more than merely using power or authority. It also meant working for justice, fairness, and the moral well-being of the people. Dharma said that rulers had to behave in the best interests of the people, making sure that their actions, notably tax policy, followed moral rules. The declaration highlighted that the state's efforts must be grounded on justice, transparency, and a devotion to the common benefit of society.

The Arthashastra, written by the ancient Indian philosopher Kautilya, lays forth clear laws for taxation and economic management. This essay says that the goal of the state is artha, or material wealth. People and society thought that prosperity was very important for their health. In the sphere of artha, taxes was not just a way to raise money, but also a way to promote fair economic growth, protect social welfare, and ensure the overall prosperity of the state. Artha encouraged the accumulation of wealth in a way that would improve the state's and its people's economic well-being, while also making sure that it was shared fairly.<sup>437</sup>

The integration of dharma and artha in governance creates a balance between moral responsibilities and economic progress. This tax equilibrium ensured that taxes were levied equitably, based on individuals' ability to pay, while also promoting collective social welfare. The amalgamation of dharma and artha in governance created a structure in which individual welfare was not sacrificed for governmental objectives, but instead aligned to foster a just and prosperous society.<sup>438</sup>

### **3.2. Ethical Foundations of Taxation in IKS**

The moral basis for taxes in the Indian Knowledge System is directly related to the state's duty to act fairly, equitably, and publicly. The Arthashastra and other ancient texts set clear rules for taxes, making sure that they weren't only ways to get money but were part of a system of fairness and social justice. According to the concept of dharma, tax collection should not hurt the poor or disadvantaged. Instead, it should encourage a system that promotes fairness and accountability.

Kautilya's Arthashastra stresses the need of fairness and transparency as the basis for taxation. The tax system was set up so that everyone would pay taxes according on how much they could afford, with richer people paying more to help the state.

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<sup>437</sup> V.M. Dandekar, "The Tax Structure in India: An Historical and Analytical Overview," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 24 (2012): 61-71.

<sup>438</sup> Bipan Chandra and Uma Verma, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008).

This system tried to balance the state's need for money with the moral duty to treat everyone fairly and equally. The Arthashastra says that rulers shouldn't take advantage of their population by unfair taxes or random collection methods. This makes sure that the tax burden is fairly shared. The state is also responsible for protecting citizens' rights and working for the common good.

IKS also thought it was vital to be responsible when it came to taxes. The rulers had two jobs: to collect taxes and make sure the money was used wisely for the sake of society, such as for public services like healthcare, education, infrastructure, and law enforcement. This accountability is important to today's tax discussion because people want the government to utilize the money it collects wisely and well for the sake of everyone.<sup>439</sup>

These moral frameworks laid the groundwork for modern tax principles like fairness, responsibility, and openness. Policymakers may utilize these ideas right now to make sure that the tax system is both fair and effective. Like the old Indian system, which focused on social justice, modern tax policy has to encourage fairness to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. This way, taxes will help society as a whole instead of making inequality worse.<sup>440</sup>

It may be concluded that the ancient ethical foundations of taxation, originating from the Indian Knowledge System, provide essential insights for contemporary tax regimes. It is an idea that has lasted through the years and is still important for making sure justice is done. This concept is the state's moral duty to make sure that taxes are fair, clear, and meant to improve people's well-being. In the continuing moral and philosophical debates about how to set up taxes such that they help both individuals and the community, these old ideas still provide us useful information that helps us build a more fair and equitable society.

## **4. Taxation in Arthashastra and Ancient Indian Governance**

### **4.1. The Principles of Taxation in Kautilya's Arthashastra**

Kautilya's Arthashastra goes into great detail on taxes and how they work in the economy. Kautilya said that it was the state's moral duty to collect taxes in a fair and efficient way. He went into depth on how to collect taxes in a way that showed how important it is to have a system that is transparent and honest and free of corruption. Kautilya suggested a system of progressive taxation that would be dependent on how much a person could pay. The idea was to make sure that the rich and the poor paid the same amount of taxes. These dharma-based notions are still relevant in today's discussions concerning tax reform.

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<sup>439</sup> Partha Ghosh, "Taxation in India: Principles and Policies," *Indian Economic Review* 35, no. 4 (2008): 89-104.

<sup>440</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

## 4.2. Tax as a Tool for Economic Balance and Social Welfare

Kautilya's tax policy focused on keeping the economy stable and improving people's lives. He says that taxes should be used for the good of everyone in society, making things like infrastructure, education, and healthcare available to everyone. This would ultimately help the state's economy. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a modern tax system in India that is built on similar ideas. It aims to create a fairer tax system that promotes economic development while making sure that income is collected and distributed fairly.

The Arthashastra places a lot of importance on fairness and transparency in tax collection. Kautilya added that being upfront about how taxes are collected not only made the system work better, but it also built trust between the government and the people. In current tax policy, the idea of trust is very important. This is because technology and data analytics are used to try to reduce tax evasion and make tax collection more efficient.<sup>441</sup>

## 4.3. Custom Laws (Import and Export) in the Light of IKS Principles

The Customs Act of 1962 is the main law that governs customs in India today. Its goals are to control the flow of goods across borders, protect the country's economic interests, and earn public money. These rules encourage trade between countries while still following tariff and non-tariff rules. In today's world, customs taxes are an important source of indirect tax revenue that is determined by trade policy, protecting local industries, and global competition. When seen through the lens of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), it is clear that in ancient India, cross-border trade and the regulation of goods entering or leaving a region were not only economically advantageous but also ethically and socially significant.

The Arthashastra and other ancient Indian texts talk of customs officials, called *navadvara adhikarin* and *sulka adhikarin*, who were stationed at ports and trade routes to collect tolls and charges on imports and exports. Kautilya stressed the need of controlled value, avoiding smuggling or under-invoicing, and having clear customs rules. Taxes on imported goods were considered legal provided they were fair, did not impede trade, and served the public good, such as infrastructure development and social welfare. The IKS approach says that laws of custom should not only help business and make money, but they should also follow *dharma*, which means fairness, protection of artisans, and national self-sufficiency (*swadeshi* ethos). At present, this can take the form of measures that balance corporate support with fair trade practices, guard against illicit trade, and make sure that tariffs are in line with goals for national development and fair growth.

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<sup>441</sup> Madhav Khosla, *The Indian Constitution: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

## 5. Modern Taxation in India: A Comparative Analysis

### 5.1. Contemporary India's Tax System: Income Tax Act and GST

In contemporary India, the tax system works within a structured and flexible framework that aims to provide the state with the funds it needs for public welfare and development initiatives. The Income Tax Act<sup>442</sup> and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) are the two main components of this system. They have both significantly improved and modernized how taxes are collected and regulated in India.<sup>443</sup>

The Income Tax Act, 1961, specifically Section 4, establishes the basis of income tax in India, introducing a progressive taxation system. It imposes taxes on individuals and businesses based on their earnings, ensuring that those with higher incomes contribute a larger share to the national revenue. The progressive nature of the tax system ensures fairness, as higher-income individuals pay a larger proportion of their earnings compared to lower-income individuals. The Income Tax Act, 1961 has also undergone significant amendments, with Section 80C providing tax incentives for savings, investments, and other financial products. These provisions aim to promote a culture of savings and financial security among citizens, aligning with the moral teachings of economic prosperity found in Kautilya's Arthashastra.<sup>444</sup>

The Goods and Services Tax (GST), introduced by the 101<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 2016, sought to replace a range of indirect taxes such as sales tax, excise duty, and service tax, creating a unified tax system across the country. The GST Act, which came into effect on July 1, 2017, is a reflection of India's efforts to simplify the indirect tax structure. By providing clarity and uniformity, GST aims to promote economic integration and streamline tax collection. The GST Council plays a key role in determining the tax rates and classifications of goods and services, thereby facilitating a more transparent and efficient tax system. This amendment, alongside the implementation of GST, marks a significant step toward modernization, which is in line with global tax standards.<sup>445</sup>

There are a variety of tax incentives, exemptions, and provisions under the Income Tax Act, 1961 and GST to encourage savings, investments, and business development. These frameworks demonstrate the government's intention to generate sufficient revenue while promoting fairness and simplifying compliance for both businesses and individuals.

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<sup>442</sup> Income Tax Act, 1961.

<sup>443</sup> Madhav Khosla, *The Indian Constitution: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>444</sup> Ram Manohar Lohia, *Gandhi: A Political Biography* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1968).

<sup>445</sup> K. Soman, *Taxation and Social Policy in India* (Hyderabad: ICAFI University Press, 2011).

## 5.2. Historical Influences of IKS on Modern Taxation Policies

Even though India's tax system has evolved significantly, the moral and philosophical underpinnings from the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) continue to shape current tax legislation. The values of fairness, responsibility, and economic balance emphasized by ancient Indian thinkers, particularly Kautilya in his Arthashastra, are embedded in the modern tax system. Kautilya's advocacy for a fair and equitable tax system, where taxes are based on one's ability to pay, is directly reflected in the progressive tax rates of the Income Tax Act. The progressive nature of the system ensures that those with higher incomes pay more, supporting social welfare and wealth redistribution.<sup>446</sup>

Moreover, the concept of dharma (righteousness) from IKS continues to be relevant in today's taxation policies, especially in ensuring the fair distribution of the tax burden across society. This principle aligns with GST's goal of creating a unified and fair tax system, where the burden is distributed equitably across all sectors of the economy, ensuring fairness and simplicity in the tax process.

The Income Tax Act, 1961 and GST not only follow the principles of fairness and economic justice but also mirror the emphasis on government transparency and accountability, concepts central to Kautilya's governance philosophy. With modern tools like tax audits, digital platforms for filing returns, and automated tax systems under GST, the system seeks to reduce corruption and increase accountability, reflecting Kautilya's vision of a moral government.

## 5.3. Aligning Ancient Principles with Present-Day Tax Structures

Combining ancient philosophical principles with contemporary tax structures is a complex challenge. However, by drawing from the ideas embedded in India's Income Tax Act, 1961 and GST framework, it is possible to create a tax system that not only generates revenue but also serves the greater good of society. Artha (material prosperity), as outlined in IKS, ties the state's responsibility to protect its people to the generation and proper distribution of wealth. The modern tax policies, including progressive taxation and social welfare programs, align with this principle by focusing on inclusive growth and economic equality, ensuring the benefits of prosperity reach all sections of society.

The GST Act and Income Tax Act reflect the dharma principle by incorporating tax reliefs, exemptions, and incentives for marginalized and economically disadvantaged sections, thus fostering social justice. For example, Section 80G of the Income Tax Act offers deductions for donations to charitable organizations, promoting a culture of giving for the welfare of the underprivileged.

As India continues to modernize its tax system, integrating the principles of dharma and artha can guide the development of tax policies that are not only

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<sup>446</sup> V.R. Krishna Iyer, *The Law and the People* (New Delhi: Eastern Book Company, 2006).

efficient but also morally sound, ensuring fairness, transparency, and shared prosperity.

## **6. IKS and Ethical Taxation: Insights for the Modern Era**

One of the most important things that the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) has left behind is its emphasis on fairness, notably in taxation and government. Kautilya, an ancient Indian philosopher, said in his book *Arthashastra* that taxes should not just be used to generate money for the state, but also to make sure that the burden of taxes is fairly shared. Kautilya, along with other ancient philosophers, recognized that taxes had to be levied according to a person's capacity to pay. The idea of fairness, which says that those with greater money should pay more, is a basic idea behind taxes in ancient India.

This notion of justice endures in modern tax systems, particularly in progressive taxation, whereby the wealthy contribute a larger share, and the tax burden is equitably allocated throughout diverse income levels. The current Income Tax Act in India shows this by setting higher tax rates for those with greater incomes. This strategy represents the obligation of the state and society to ensure fair allocation of economic prosperity, hence advancing social justice. The *Arthashastra* advocated for fairness in tax collection and spending, stressing that the resources generated should be used for the welfare of society, especially to aid the disadvantaged.<sup>447</sup>

This idea is still very important today, especially when people talk about the gap between the rich and the poor and the necessity for laws that redistribute money. This historical knowledge has molded modern India, which has a progressive tax system that aims to reduce wealth disparity and make sure that state resources are used for the common good and social fairness.

## **7. Addressing Contemporary Challenges in Taxation through IKS**

In the 21st century, India's tax system has a lot of big problems, such as widespread tax evasion, corruption, and not enough input in how money is spent and how taxes are collected. Modern legal and administrative reforms aim to address these issues, while the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers supplementary and frequently fundamental insights that can improve ethical tax governance, promote voluntary compliance, and reframe taxation as a tool for inclusive development rather than merely a means of revenue generation. This section looks at how Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which are based on ancient texts like the *Arthashastra*, *Manusmriti*, and *Mahabharata*, could help policymakers and administrators deal with two long-standing problems in public finance: tax evasion and corruption, as well as development that includes everyone.

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<sup>447</sup> Upendra Baxi, "Access to Justice: A Comparative Perspective," *Indian Journal of International Law* 28, no. 2 (1990): 111-127.

## 7.1 Tax Evasion and Corruption

In India, tax evasion is a big problem for managing public finances well. Recent estimates show that a large part of the country's wealth is not included in the official tax system because people underreport their income, change their accounts, and don't follow the rules. Corruption in the tax administration system, which is typically shown by bribery, favoritism, and political intervention, makes people less trusting of the system and less open about money.

Kautilya (Chanakya) wrote the *Arthashastra* more than 2,000 years ago. It includes extremely advanced and useful ways to deal with these problems. Kautilya stressed how important it is to have surveillance and internal audits as basic tools for tax administration. Tax collectors (*samaharta*) and accountants (*nyayadhikarin*) had to follow strict rules of behavior, and they were subject to surprise inspections and frequent audits. There were quick consequences for breaking ethical rules or abusing power. Kautilya well understood how hard it is to find corruption. He said, "Just as it is impossible to avoid tasting honey or poison on the tongue, it is also impossible for a government official to avoid eating, at least in part, the King's revenue."

**To counter this, the *Arthashastra* prescribed:**

- Rotational duties and job transfers to avoid entrenchment of power
- Double-entry accounting systems
- Anonymous feedback mechanisms from the citizenry
- Incentives for honest behavior and whistleblowing

In today's world, these ideals fit with things like the Lokpal, internal vigilance units, open digital audits, and evaluations based on performance. The IKS method puts more emphasis on moral responsibility and external deterrents. It also encourages tax officials to follow the values of dharma and service (*seva*). Training programs based on this idea might help change the way the administration thinks about power and stewardship.

## 7.2 Inclusive Development

A major problem in the present tax discussion is making sure that tax money benefits everyone in society, especially those who are left out or are at risk. In India, where socio-economic disparities persist across caste, gender, and regional boundaries, it is imperative that taxes be both progressively structured and redistributively aimed. Taxes should not just be a way for the state to make money, but also a way to promote social justice, public welfare, and economic opportunity for the *janapada*, which is the old Indian term for the people.

The Indian Knowledge System provides a robust conceptual framework for inclusive development via the dual ideals of dharma (moral responsibility) and artha (economic prosperity). Kautilya clearly stated in the *Arthashastra* that "the happiness of the King is the happiness of his subjects." This idea stresses that taxes are only justified if they help the people. Tax income have to be used for things

like public infrastructure (like roads and irrigation), social security (like helping those who are starving), and boosting economic activity (like giving artisans and merchants money).

The classical Indian idea of statecraft highlighted "raja dharma," which means that the king had to protect the vulnerable and keep society in balance. Taxes on trade, farming, and luxury spending that were well thought out were a key way to make sure that no class, whether it was the monarchy, merchants, or laborers, had too much to pay or too much to gain.

### **In the present situation, this necessitates:**

- Enhanced investment in health, education, and rural development utilizing tax proceeds
- Augmenting tax exemptions or incentives for small-scale firms, women entrepreneurs, and socially disadvantaged groups
- Participatory budgeting, which is when people in a community help decide how to spend local tax money.

Fiscal decentralization allows panchayats and urban local governments to distribute tax resources based on regional need.

IKS also sees money not as a status symbol, but as a resource that should be used to help the whole community grow. This ideology may change the way taxes are communicated to make paying them seem like a patriotic and moral responsibility, which might lead to more people voluntarily following the rules and being involved in their communities.

## **8. Sustainability and Social Responsibility in Taxation**

Another major notion that came from IKS and has vital uses today is the emphasis on sustainability. For ancient Indian thinkers and intellectuals, it was necessary to make development in the economy while also safeguarding the environment and making people's lives better. An all-encompassing picture of wealth may help us understand modern tax policy in light of important global problems like climate change and economic sustainability.

To include the idea of sustainability from IKS into existing taxation, it is important to focus on policies that preserve the environment while also promoting long-term economic health. One way to do this is via green taxation, often called environmental taxes. These taxes try to reward acts that are good for the environment and punish actions that are bad for it. One method to reach this aim is to tax industries that pollute and provide people incentives to use green technology. IKS teaches that true prosperity, especially when it comes to artha (material wealth), can only be achieved in a way that is good for the long term, so

that the economy and the environment may continue to flourish for hundreds of years.<sup>448</sup>

*The state's social commitment, a key idea in IKS, still affects modern efforts to employ taxes for inclusive growth. In ancient India, the government had to put the needs of its people first and share resources for the good of everyone. This is in line with modern tax policies that aim to reduce inequality and meet the needs of poor people. Taxes pay for important social services including healthcare, education, and social security. These programs are meant to reduce inequality and promote social justice. The state's duty to provide economic inclusion and mitigate poverty is as crucial now as it was in ancient times.*

## **9. Integrating Indian Knowledge System into Modern Taxation Education**

Modern tax education in India, especially in economics, public administration, and law, has been largely shaped by Western ideas on fiscal policy and theory. While they are important tools for understanding contemporary tax systems, they frequently don't have the moral and cultural base that fits with Indian society as a whole. Integrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into taxation education provides an opportunity to enhance the study of public finance by connecting it to the nation's deep civilizational values. By including classical texts like as the Arthashastra, Manusmriti, and relevant Upanishadic ideas, taxation may be shown not just as a means of government, but as a moral obligation of both the sovereign and the people. The idea that "the happiness of the king lies in the happiness of his subjects" sets up a fiscal strategy that is focused on the people, which is quite different from technocratic and utilitarian frameworks. Integrating these concepts into the curriculum may cultivate future tax professionals and administrators who possess not just legal expertise but also a keen ethical awareness of their responsibilities.

Furthermore, schooling that includes Indigenous Knowledge Systems encourages an interdisciplinary approach that combines economics with philosophy, ethics, and governance studies. Taxation and public policy courses have to include modules on historical revenue systems, distributive justice, and community welfare procedures used throughout Indian kingdoms, alongside comparative studies of contemporary tax legislation such as the GST, Direct Tax Code, and Income Tax Act<sup>449</sup>. This helps children learn more about history and understand taxes as an important tool for establishing a country that includes everyone. Legal education may also gain from case-based discussions on rajadharma, tax adjudication processes in ancient courts, and principles of equitable levy and

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<sup>448</sup> Faizan Mustafa, "Constitutional Law in India: A Study of Governance and Reforms," *Journal of Indian Law and Society* 27, no. 3 (2015): 43-56.

<sup>449</sup> Income Tax Act, 1961.

exemption as seen in classical jurisprudence. From this point of view, tax specialists would learn not just how to make sure people follow the rules and punish those who don't, but also how to balance fairness with efficiency and state money with public benefit. In the end, adding IKS to tax education might help create a new generation of tax officials and lawmakers who regard being responsible with money as more than just a job; they see it as a deep commitment to public service.

## 10. Conclusion

This chapter stresses how important the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is to current tax policy. Integrating ancient principles, namely dharma (righteousness) and artha (prosperity), into modern tax administration establishes a foundation for a taxation system that is efficient, ethically sound, socially responsible, equitable, and sustainable. India's contemporary tax system, despite the challenges posed by modernity, may nevertheless benefit from the lasting principles inherent in IKS. Governments might come up with a tax system that focuses on fairness, economic balance, and the well-being of people by thinking about the ideas of ancient Indian thinkers like Kautilya. The focus on sustainability and social responsibility in IKS may lead to changes in taxes in the future. This will make sure that modern taxes meet both economic needs and the larger goals of sustainable development and inclusive growth. By looking back at what has worked in the past, India may be able to create a tax system that ensures fairness, solves current problems with government, and promotes a more fair and prosperous society. The principles of IKS provide India a moral and intellectual foundation for making a tax system that works well and is good for the public good and social welfare, which will make the future more equitable for everyone.

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### **Brief Profile of Author**

**Dr. Pratima Soni** is a distinguished academic and legal professional with over a decade of experience in legal education and administration. Holding degrees in Commerce and Law, she specializes in Corporate Law, Financial Laws, and Bankruptcy & Insolvency Laws. Currently, she serves as Associate Dean and Assistant Professor at ICFAI Law School, The ICFAI University, Jaipur, and is known for her innovative teaching and active student engagement.

Dr. Soni has authored multiple books, including *GST and E-commerce: Legal Implications in the Indian Market and Taxation Laws*, and contributed six research papers and six book chapters, including award-winning work on cross-border mergers. She holds a patent for an AI-Based Device for Automated Nanoparticle Coating.

An accomplished administrator and mentor, she leads initiatives like the Legal Aid and Pro Bono Club, PI Coordinator Unnat Bharat Abhiyan, and the Centre for Consumer Protection. Her contributions have been recognized by ICFAI University and the Uniraj Alumni Federation for her societal impact.

**Mob.** +91 9462692353

**E-mail** – pratimasoni12@gmail.com, pratimasoni13@gmail.com

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## Indian Knowledge System and Economics

**Dr. Shweta Mohan**

*Ex Acting Vice -Chancellor*

*National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi*

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### **Abstract**

*Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) exemplifies knowledge, tradition and practices, along with theories disseminated by natives in natural environment. IKS has far-fetched impact on the way of our lives. When we predominantly dialogue about economics and IKS, Kautilya's Arthashastra stands as a masterpiece of times. Arthashastra is a work of art on economics and state governance which offers farmwork for the state to follow economic thought aligned with sustainability, and resource management. The idea of Arthashastra is all governance of a state with efficient law and policy prioritising collective well-being which is , mutually enduring. Kautilya's thought-provoking concepts on ecological balance over short term gain Integrating IKS into modern economic discourse can enrich policy-making, foster sustainable development, and support diverse practices worldwide. This abstract explores the potential for IKS to reshape economic thought, particularly in areas such as environmental economics, circular economies, and community-based development with special reference to Kautilya 's Arthashastra.*

**Keywords:** *IKS , Economics ,Welfare ,Law and Policy, Arthashastra*

*विद्याधनं सर्वधनप्रधानम्।*

*The wealth of knowledge is most important among all the wealth*

### **Introduction**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and economics establishes an imperative field of study in the contemporary world. The roots of such interface are very much visible in the ancient Indian philosophy. IKS has always advocated harmonious co-existence of human beings with environmental ecosystem. Moreover, the Indian Knowledge System mirrors paramount notions of dharma, karma, and moksha. These ideas have collectively shaped the moral and social behaviour in the Indian milieu The concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which states that "the entire world is one family," represents the very inclusive landscape of sustainable living.

The central work of Kautilya's texts is on Indian economic thought which has historically developed through thought analysing, traditional as well as contemporary viewpoints. For centuries, Indian panache of governance practices has been in collision with the ancient Vedas, Smritis, Mahabharat and Ramayan.

The same can be observed in Arthashastra which examines statecraft. Economic governance is fundamental in Arthashastra aimed to reach out economics with ethics.

The novel curiosity in the IKS, particularly in the family of modern pecuniary discourse, specifies that its pertinence in embark upon contemporary issues. It is more towards the sustainability and social responsibility which is becoming increasingly acknowledged these days. This was more than a realization in the times of Covid 19 and post Covid period. Even the World Bank is mindful of the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and its budding worth in terms of inclusive growth and development. IKS, which refer to the traditional knowledge, practices, and beliefs of indigenous and local communities, are regarded as an untapped resource that can enhance the understanding of local contexts and the effectiveness and sustainability of development interventions.

Historically, Indian economic thought has developed through different schools of analysis, including colonial, nationalist, and postcolonial views. Imperative works of Kautilya's have served as foundational texts in IKS. He had interfaced the nexus between ethics (Dharma) and economics (Artha), it presents the theory of statecraft and governance. According to this theory, knowledge comes from four fundamental domains: economics, government science, reasoning, and the Vedas. Furthermore, Romesh Chandra Dutt in his Economic History of India portrays information regarding the colonial policies which ruined India's traditional industries. Dutt's contribution is noteworthy in grasping the economic costs of British rule on our nation. Furthermore, analysing the radical work of VKRV Rao, the great Economist who contributed to education, particularly establishing institutions like the Delhi School of Economics and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, it turns out to be crystal clear that the wider concept of Indian Knowledge Systems was very much encompassing. Hence what we observe is that VKRV Rao's ideas are in tandem with the IKS. Therefore, we find that all the preliminary discourses with respect to IKS endorses comprehensive socio-economic development with good governance to achieve inclusive growth for the country. Recently there has been much effort to underpin the paramount role of IKS, in today's economic deliberations. Such steps exhibit acceptance of present-day issues like sustainability and social-economic accountability.

At the same time IKS is challenged with limited pertinence with respect to current situations over the globe. Critics around that traditional Western economic paradigms rarely take into account India's special socio-economic nature, thus compelling a reassessment of economic strategies that adopt local wisdom and practices. Additionally, continued attempts at rejuvenating rural economies by implementing IKS demonstrate the promise of sustainable development based on indigenous knowledge, which can provide avenues for economic security and cultural preservation.

Recently India has tabled the role of IKS with special reference to economic wisdom for the inclusive growth and development of the world. As IKS works on traditional insight with pioneering rational, there are huge prospect for harmonious economic growth for the entire world.

### **Historical Background**

Indian economic thought and literatures that have fashioned good governance and economic prosperity over the ages. The work credited to Kautilya is one of the foundational works in this area and is still important for its examination of economic governance and statecraft. Over the centuries, both Indian and European statesmanship have been influenced by Kautilya's observations about the traits of bureaucrats and statesmen. Several prominent schools of thought, including Colonial, Nationalist, Marxist, post-structural, and postcolonial, have influenced the development of economic historiography in India. The contentious evaluations of the effects of British rule on the Indian economy served as a catalyst for this historiographical development. Academics have highlighted the significance of asserted that a more regional focus that recognises the rich economic traditions of various regions, such as the North-East, Maratha regions, and southern maritime trade, is necessary to comprehend India's economic history beyond a Delhi-centric narrative.

The story of colonial impact is further complicated by the fact that Islamic rule in the north of India during the mediaeval era largely shaped the country's economic landscape. Significant changes to India's economic structure were brought about by the arrival of colonial powers, especially the Britisher who substituted the Mughal government and introduced new nation-state ideals that had a long-lasting impact on the world economy. Furthermore, in the early 20th century, a unique field of Indian economics emerged as a result of the interaction between nationalist political agitation and colonial government educational policies. By focussing on a national developmental agenda and separating themselves from classical economic theories that frequently failed to take into account India's particular socioeconomic circumstances, influential figures Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Radhakamal Mukherjee and others attempted to address Indian economic realities through the creation of textbooks . The development of Indian economic thought as a normative science focused on the material advancement of its people was shaped during this crucial juncture, when economic discourse became entangled with the broader nationalist movement along with a welfare of the masses.

### **Imperatives of the Indian Knowledge System**

Since time immemorial the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), has entrusted upon the interrelationship of human being with the ecological systems. We can trace out the same from the ancient philosophical ethnicities. Imperative concepts like Dharma, Artha Karma, and Moksha are the constitution of IKS which deliver sustainable

practices and ethical behaviour. This very concept is “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,” meaning by “the entire world is one family.” Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, acme the worth of living in accord with nature and by accepting the interrelation of human beings with the ecosystem. IKS has its foundations in philosophy that is Darshan Shatra. However, the pursuit of Dharma, Artha Karma is to attain the Moksha. The idea of Artha is more than material wellbeing in Kautilya ‘s Arthashastra. Dharma which is frequently translated as duty or righteousness, is essential for directing moral judgements and social obligations of a king. Here the law of cause and effect, also known as karma, emphasises the significance of deeds and their results, motivating people to behave responsibly towards their community and environment. Therefore, Karma encourages thoughtful living that respects ecological balances, which ultimately advances the ideas sustainability. This awareness of sustainability can be outlined back to the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, where the perception of sustainable development was recognized as an international principle, leading to the adoption of Agenda 21. Another core idea of IKS is moksha, or liberation, which represents the ultimate purpose of human life. It places a strong emphasis on self-realization and the pursuit of a higher consciousness that goes beyond worldly desires. In order to promote a sustainable lifestyle that respects natural resources, this endeavour encourages people to place a higher priority on spiritual development than consumption .

The present-day environmental concerns can be treated by the very idea of IKS which fosters commitment of co-existing of humans with the nature. It is pertinent to mention over here that one of the basic principle of economics is allocation of resources with environmental stewardship. Moreover, this has been an ancient practice of local communities since ages keeping in tandem the idea of resource conservation. The awareness appries our present-day sustainable initiatives, which is demonstrated by traditional practices like organic farming. Andhra Pradesh is known for the use of traditional farming practices. The said exercise is carried out to increase the harvest. Additionally, we can see, ayurvedic therapy in Kerala where incorporation of ayurvedic therapy led to formulation of healthcare policies. The preservation of cultural heritage along with implementation of policy led to enhanced public health system in Kerela. One more example is traditional handicrafts in Rajasthan which promoted traditional crafts in the state but also directed the boost in local economy to preserve the skills of the artisans. The is a good example of Make in India concept. This inkling is very apparent in Kautilya’s consciousness of prosperous state constructed on long-term reliability, based on sustainable development. According to Kautilya’s sustainable use of natural resources balances ecological resource with efficiency. One such illustration is the use of natural fertilisers and rainwater harvesting systems described in Arthshastra. The same stands true for the natural resource conservation and environmental law in the present day.

Kautilya had underpinned the economic stability over quick profits by the implementation of traditional practices that revere the earth and its resources. According to him this is the ethical situation which sustains the purity of nature. Nevertheless, it is an established fact that Indian philosophy chairs a strong accent on ecological conservation, which is evidenced in the writings such as the Rigveda .

It is very interesting to mention over here that Kautilya did not only highlights on sustainable development but also on stable and fair taxation for the allocation of resources for the welfare of the state. Kautilya's Arthashastra is a discourse on statecraft, including public finance and tax administration. His idea, of taxation is deeply rooted in 'Kosha *Moolo Danda*' meaning by "revenue is the backbone of the government". As mentioned before, tax is a major source of revenue for the state. Our constitution too, emphasizes on equitable distribution of taxation for the centre and state governments.

### **Contemporary Implication of Arthashastra**

Kautilya's thoughts are pertinent in today's scenario. The socio-economic history of India throws light on discourse of Arthashastra. Time and again Arthashastra has proved to be the foundational texts that stimulus contemporary political and economic theory in India. The Economic milieu under the Indian Knowledge System, particularly those found in old records like the Arthashastra, insights methods that are becoming more and more imperious in the recent economy. Moreover, these chronicles dwell upon on moral and ethical issues in today's economic gesture. Today these gestures are merged into current corporate procedures. For illustration, the theories drawn from Kautilya's literatures not only care administration by the government but also place a lofty significance on morality, justice, and social responsibility. This very idea can be one of the measures for corporate houses to match their procedures with these high standards. IKS nurtures the traditional systems and cultural conservancy. This very idea is incorporated by National Education Policy (NEP-2020).

### **Relevance in Today's World**

**1. The integration of Governance & Public Administration** - Arthashastra underlines major role of central government with socio -economic welfare of the citizens. It mirrors the framework of DPSP of the state policy of our constitution. Furthermore, the Contemporary importance bring into line with today's principles of efficient governance in welfare policies anti-corruption policy etc. For example, Digital India initiatives reflect innovative management with transparency, parallel to the treatise of Arthashastra's

**2. Taxation and Economic Policy**– Kautilya's Arthashastra is keen towards economic wealth through trade, agriculture, and taxation. The same idea is very much present in Mercantilism and Classical School of thought. Our country which

is has adopted the progressive taxation system corresponds to Caldor Hicks criteria which gives due emphasis to compensation in terms of resource allocation. Therefore, what we see in present is that the role of government in the market is very swift. Competition Commission of India Act 2002 and state-supported Initiatives under the Atmanirbhar Bharat scheme, are some examples in expanding markets while maintaining traditional expertise.

**3. National Security & Intelligence-** Kautilya extensively conversed on intelligence, counter-intelligence, and strategic defence. We observe that nations invest heavily in intelligence agencies (e.g., RAW, CIA) and cybersecurity, reverberating Kautilya's emphasis on information and broadcasting, warfare and core vigilance.

**4. Foreign Policy & Diplomacy-** Kautilya familiarized the "Mandala Theory", which catalogues adjoining states as rivals or associates based on strategic interest. This idea is very analogous to pragmatist theories in international relations as states act in self-interest to capitalize on power. A good example is India-China-strategic dynamics. The recent trade war between USA and India, Brazil displays tactical sovereignty in foreign policy mirroring Kautilya's flexible and realistic approach towards statecraft.

**5. Headship & Ethics-** According to Kautilya a leader should own persuasion, acumen, and ethical values. At the same time, he/she can exercise practical politics as and when required. Contemporary management, expressly in government sector and corporate sectors, necessitates a balance of naivety and realism as mentioned in Arthashastra.

**6. Sustainable Development-** The origin of sustainable development is from IKS. The concept of dharma, ahimsa, and environmental accord are the pillars of sustainable development. These primitive notions offer perceptive leadership to balance between social, economic, and environmental goals, enabling a critical approach to handle contemporary issues. The relevance of IKS has been strengthened by interdisciplinary research demonstrating traditional practices aptly suited for contemporary situations.

**7. Policies Advocacy-** There are various policy suggestions from think tanks to inspire the merger of IKS into progressive initiatives. The incorporation of IKS requires setting up IKS centres imparting professional drill Moreover, to tap the economic potential of Indian traditional knowledge initiatives like tourism based on IKS can foster more of the opportunities for international trade. This will impact the geo-political coordination amongst the countries to foster economic growth.

**8. Financial Restraints-** The above-mentioned policy if implemented can tackle the impediment of Indian economy. There are challenges of unemployment, illiteracy and poverty confines the efficiency of our economy. Therefore, it is imperative to instil the idea of IKS for resilient growth.

### **Conclusion**

There is a strong demand to incorporate Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS) into recent socio- economic planning of the country. It is advocated that IKS offers sustainable resolutions to the country specific issues. However, this combination is still not discovered in normal discourses yet, a comprehensive thought of scientific and philosophical legacy can bid acumens that backs sustainable development goals.

Kautilya's Arthashastra is an early doctrine which has established it as a timeless guide to leadership, governance, and policy. In today's multifaceted world—marked by geopolitical tensions, economic challenges, and leadership crises—it offers t reminds us that power, when guided by wisdom and ethical pragmatism, can lead to sustainable governance and national prosperity

### **Important Books**

- 1.Arthashastra by Chanakya
- 2 Economic History of India Romesh Dutt

### **Important Readings**

- <https://iksindia.org/>
- <https://www.iitkgp.ac.in/department/KS>

### **Brief Profile of Dr Shweta Mohan**

**Dr. Shweta Mohan** is an Assistant Professor (Selection Grade ) of Economics in National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi, since 2010. She has served as Acting Vice-Chancellor of National University of Study and Research in Law, Ranchi from September, 2013 to February, 2014. She has extensively researched on Law and Economics. She has completed her Doctoral Research from Chanakya National Law University, Patna. She is the editor of the book *Mental Health and Legal Rights (2024) 'Recent Trends in Law and Economics' (2021)*. She is also the editor of the book *"Economic Analysis of Law" (2021)*, and has authored the book titled *"Legal Regulation of Agricultural Procurement and Processing in India (2013)* She has national international publications to her credit. She has PhD scholar on the thesis titled *"Migrant Labours in the State of Jharkhand: A Socio-Legal Study"*. She has also completed Major Project on *Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF) sponsored by World Bank*. She has shouldered various administrative responsibility.

**Mobile:** 8002666858

**Email:** shweta.mohan@nusrlranchi.ac.in

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## Indian Knowledge System and Management

**Ms. Kajal Chauhan**

*Assistant Professor*

*Rai School of Management Studies,  
Rai University Ahmedabad, Gujarat*

**Dr. Maulik K Rathod**

*Assistant Professor*

*Rai School of Management Studies,  
Rai University Ahmedabad, Gujarat*

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### **Abstract**

*The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) represents a vast reservoir of ancient wisdom encompassing philosophy, science, and sophisticated principles of life and resource management. In the contemporary globalized environment, integrating these traditional tenets into modern organizational paradigms is crucial for fostering sustainable economic growth and instilling national identity. This paper establishes a compelling framework for applying the timeless wisdom embedded in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita to contemporary management practices, both professional and personal.*

***Specifically, the study explores:** (1) How the core messages of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita guide leaders in executing their duties (Karma Yoga) with focused commitment and mental equilibrium (Nishkama Karma); and (2) How spiritual and ethical values (Dharma) drawn from Indian philosophy can enrich modern management, aligning it with global imperatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

*The research analytically examines key Shrimad Bhagavad Gita teachings—such as the five factors necessary for action (Adhi, Karta, Karanam, Cestah, and Daivam)—and draws parallels with modern concepts like ethical leadership, team synergy, and stress-free decision-making. The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita's principles advocate for balancing effort with non-attachment and prioritizing collective action based on Dharma (righteous duty). Ultimately, the Bhagavad Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and the wider IKS offer a profound, time-tested ethical compass to redefine organizational success, moving beyond mere efficiency to holistic success, prosperity, and happiness (Vijayam, Shree, and Sukham).*

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Values, Ethical Leadership, Dharma, Ancient Wisdom, Indian Philosophy in Management, Nishkama Karma, Sustainable Development Goals.*

**I. Introduction:** The prevailing management paradigm, often rooted in the Anglo-American industrial model, primarily champions shareholder primacy, quarterly financial results, and a transactional style of leadership. While undeniably successful in driving efficiency and economic output, this model is increasingly criticized for generating systemic organizational stress, encouraging short-termism, and fostering a profound disconnect between individual purpose and professional life, often leading to ethical drift.<sup>450</sup> The recent global resurgence of interest in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a sophisticated, time-tested counter-narrative. Actively promoted through governmental initiatives like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the IKS moves beyond mere history, presenting management as a holistic discipline integrated with ethics, self-mastery, and sustainable societal well-being (*Loka Samgraha*). Among the core texts of the IKS, the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*—a spiritual and philosophical discourse on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra*—stands as the most relevant treatise for contemporary organizational challenges.<sup>451</sup> It provides a complete "Science of Action" (*Karma*).

This paper is motivated by the need to bridge this critical gap, arguing that the wisdom of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* provides a robust, ethical, and psychologically sound foundation for modern organizational excellence.<sup>452</sup> It specifically examines how the principles of *Dharma* (righteous duty) and *Nishkama Karma* (selfless action without attachment to outcomes) can transform conventional transactional management into transformational leadership. By analyzing the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*'s teachings on mental equilibrium (*Samatvam*) and the nature of action, this study seeks to offer actionable insights for managers and organizations striving for not only profit but also a deeper form of holistic success (*Vijayam, Shree, and Sukham*), directly aligning corporate purpose with global responsibilities, notably the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **II. The Indian Knowledge System and its Relevance to Modern Management:**

The IKS views the individual, the organization, and the environment as interconnected parts of a single cosmic system. This holistic worldview contrasts sharply with the reductionist approaches common in many Western management models. The IKS emphasizes that enduring success is a byproduct of ethical actions and inner development, not merely external manipulations of resources and markets.

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<sup>450</sup> R. Edward Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Boston: Pitman, 1984), 5–25.

<sup>451</sup> L. M. Prasad, "Spiritualism in Management: The Indian Context," *Journal of Human Values*, 1, no. 1 (1995): 5–22.

<sup>452</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, *The BhagavadShrimad Bhagavad Gita : With an Introductory Essay, Sanskrit Text, English Translation and Notes* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 54–60.

Management in the Indian context is often equated with *Prabandha* (excellent binding or arrangement), implying a deep responsibility for the welfare of all stakeholders, or *Sarva Loka Hitam* (the welfare of all). This philosophical base gives rise to management tenets based on self-reflection, duty, and spiritual values.<sup>453</sup> Subhash Sharma, a key proponent of Indian management thought, articulates this as moving from the Western windows of analysis and efficiency to the Eastern doors of synthesis and wisdom.<sup>454</sup>

**The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* offers a clear path to this wisdom, providing a psychological blueprint for performance:**

1. **Work as Worship (*Yajna*):** Action is not a burden but a necessity for cosmic and social order.
2. **Self-Mastery:** Controlling the senses and the mind is the foundation for effective external management.
3. **Holistic View:** Understanding the interconnectedness of all actions and their long-term consequences.

The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* states that for any work to be completed, five factors are involved (18.14) the body (*Adhithanam*), the ego or doer (*Karta*), the instruments (*Karanam*), the different kinds of efforts (*Cestah*), and the divine or destiny (*Daivam*). This comprehensive view encourages managers to acknowledge not only the tangible resources and efforts but also the subtle psychological and unpredictable external forces (like market shifts or global events) that influence outcomes. This recognition fosters humility and resilience, essential traits for contemporary leaders.

**III. Ethical Leadership and Decision-Making: Lessons from the Shrimad Bhagavad Shrimad Bhagavad Gita:** The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*'s primary context—a moral crisis on a battlefield—makes it an unparalleled source for ethical leadership and decision-making. *Arjun's* dilemma mirrors that of any modern CEO facing a challenging layoff, a competitive price war, or a decision with conflicting ethical implications. *Bhagvan Shree Krushn's* advice is fundamentally about ethical action and moral courage.

**Dharma as the Foundation of Ethical Leadership:** The concept of *Dharma* is the cornerstone of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*'s ethical framework. It is often translated as righteousness, duty, or the natural order that sustains the universe. In

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<sup>453</sup> S. K. Chakraborty, "Value Systems for Management Development: Indian Insights," *Vikalpa*, 12, no. 1 (1987): 1–18.

<sup>454</sup> Subhash Sharma, *Management in New Age: Western Windows Eastern Doors* (New Delhi: New Age International, 2006), 35.

a management context, *Dharma* is the moral compass that guides all organizational activities.<sup>455</sup>

A *Dharma*-centric leader does not merely comply with the law; they operate based on higher ethical principles, ensuring that their actions contribute positively to society. This approach aligns perfectly with the modern emphasis on trust and integrity, as seen in the management philosophy of thinkers like Stephen Covey, who prioritized character ethics over personality ethics.<sup>456</sup>

**Individual Duty (Svadharmā) and Role Clarity in Organizations:** The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* stresses the importance of performing one's own duty, or *Svadharmā*, with excellence, rather than attempting to perform the duty of another.

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥

Shrimad Bhagavad Gita 3.35

**Meaning:** Better is one's own *Dharma*, though imperfectly performed, than the *Dharma* of another well-performed. Death in one's own *Dharma* is better; the *Dharma* of another is fraught with danger.

**Management Interpretation:** This teaching is critical for role clarity and focus in organizations. It encourages employees and leaders to deeply understand their specific mandate, develop competence in their core function, and avoid the distraction or envy of others' roles. It promotes the idea that true success comes from mastering one's inherent potential (the *Sva* of *Svadharmā*) and contributing that unique skill set to the team. This promotes genuine accountability and minimizes unnecessary conflict, creating the highly focused work environment advocated by modern management gurus like Peter Drucker, who stressed that clarity of purpose is key to effectiveness.<sup>457</sup>

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as Organizational Dharma:** In the IKS framework, CSR is not a regulatory compliance task or a peripheral philanthropic activity; it is the organizational *Dharma*.<sup>458</sup> The organization, as a collective entity, has a duty to the society that sustains it. The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* repeatedly emphasizes the concept of *Yajna* (sacrifice or service) for the welfare of the world.

- An organization performs its *Yajna* by operating ethically, providing quality goods and services, ensuring fair treatment of employees, and actively contributing to societal upliftment.

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<sup>455</sup> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Srimad Bhagavad Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya or Karma Yoga Sastra*, vol. 1 (Poona: Tilak Bros., 1935), 185.

<sup>456</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>457</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 126–140.

<sup>458</sup> K. Sood and P. Gupta, "Exploring the Role of Indian Knowledge System in Shaping Corporate Social Responsibility," *Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies*, 2, no. 1 (2020): 45–58.

- This perspective directly links organizational function to broader societal well-being, transforming CSR from an expenditure into an essential, moral act of existence.

**Duty and Detachment (*Nishkama Karma*):** The Path to Stress-Free Performance. Perhaps the most famous teaching of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* and the most potent tool for modern management is the doctrine of *Nishkama Karma* (action without attachment to the results).

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

### **Shrimad Bhagavad Gita 2.47**

**Meaning:** You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, nor should you be attached to inaction.

**Management Interpretation:** This verse is a profound tool for stress management and motivation. In a results-driven corporate world, the pressure to achieve targets often leads to anxiety, burnout, and unethical shortcuts. *Nishkama Karma* advises the manager to focus solely on the *process*—the quality of the effort, the planning, and the ethicality of the means—while accepting that the final outcome (*Phala*) is influenced by many factors beyond one’s control (the *Daivam*). This detachment from the outcome:

- **Reduces Performance Anxiety:** The fear of failure, the root cause of much organizational stress, is minimized.
- **Promotes Excellence:** Energy is channeled into enhancing the quality of the action itself.
- **Fosters Collaboration:** By reducing personal claim over results, leaders are better able to share success and failure, building stronger teams.

This concept encourages a growth mindset—focusing on effort and learning—rather than a fixed mindset focused purely on external validation and rewards.

**Cultivating a Culture of Duty and Accountability:** A management culture steeped in the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita's* wisdom cultivates a high sense of duty and accountability. When every employee understands their role as *Svadharmā* and their action as *Karma Yoga* (the discipline of action), the need for excessive external policing is reduced.

### **The organizational climate shifts to one where:**

- **Self-Control is Valued:** The leader models inner discipline (*Samyama*) before attempting to control external factors.
- **Teamwork is Organic:** Collaborators work together with a spirit of *Seva* (selfless service) towards a common goal (*Dharma*).

- **Decision-Making is Ethical:** Decisions prioritize *organizational Dharma* and long-term societal impact over short-term personal gain.

This culture aligns with the managerial best practices of empowerment and distributed leadership, where every individual takes ownership of their part of the mission.

**IV. Integrating Shrimad Bhagavad Gita 's Wisdom with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The ultimate test of any management philosophy today is its contribution to sustainability and global development. The principles of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* and IKS are remarkably aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), moving beyond mere economic viability to include ethical, social, and environmental responsibility.

<b>Shrimad Bhagavad Gita / IKS Principle</b>	<b>Related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)</b>	<b>Management Application</b>
<i>Dharma and SarvaLokaHitam</i> (Welfare of All)	<b>SDG 1:</b> No Poverty & <b>SDG 10:</b> Reduced Inequalities	Committing to ethical supply chains, fair wages, and inclusive business models.
<i>Yajna</i> (Sacrifice/Service)	<b>SDG 12:</b> Responsible Consumption and Production	Viewing production as a service; eliminating waste; designing sustainable products.
<i>Prakriti</i> (Nature) Harmony	<b>SDG 13:</b> Climate Action & <b>SDG 15:</b> Life on Land	Respecting ecological balance; adopting regenerative business practices; minimizing carbon footprint.
<i>Svadharm</i> (Role Clarity)	<b>SDG 4:</b> Quality Education & <b>SDG 8:</b> Decent Work and Economic Growth	Fostering employee growth, skill development, and purposeful work environments.

**V. Conclusion:** The search for a truly sustainable and humane model of management leads inexorably back to the ancient wisdom of the Indian Knowledge System, and in particular, the profound teachings of the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*. The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* provides more than just ethical guidelines; it offers a comprehensive psychology of action that can transform the modern workplace from a theater of stress and competition into an arena of purposeful contribution and excellence.

By anchoring leadership in *Dharma*, emphasizing focused effort through *Nishkama Karma*, and valuing self-mastery over external control, managers can cultivate organizational cultures that yield not only financial success but also genuine prosperity and happiness for all stakeholders. The integration of these principles moves management beyond the constraints of a purely materialist worldview, offering a path to individual fulfillment and organizational alignment with global goals, thereby making a critical, timeless contribution to contemporary management thought. The *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*, therefore, is not a relic of the past, but a necessary manual for future-ready, ethical, and sustainable leadership.

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### **Brief Profile of Authors**

**Ms. Kajal Chauhan** is an Assistant Professor at the Rai School of Management Studies, Rai University, Ahmedabad, Gujarat. She holds a Master's degree in Business Administration and is actively engaged in researching the confluence of ancient Indian philosophy and contemporary business practices. Her primary research interests lie in the fields of Human Resource Management, Organizational Behaviour, and the practical application of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) to foster ethical leadership and spiritual values in the corporate sector. Ms. Chauhan has contributed to several national and international conferences, bringing her insights on Dharma and Svadharma to a modern academic audience. Her work aims to make traditional Indian wisdom accessible and actionable for students and practicing managers alike.

**Mob** - +91 9695082211

**E-mail** - kajalchauhan0603@gmail.com

**Dr. Maulik K. Rathod** is a distinguished Assistant Professor at Rai University, Gujarat, with over 20 years of extensive experience in both academia and the corporate sector. Dr. Maulik has made significant contributions to his areas of expertise and has an impressive publication record in national and international journals. His research covers a wide range of topics, including general management, green marketing, corporate social responsibility, customer relationship management, sustainable development, entrepreneurship, Indian knowledge systems, higher education, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and soft skills. As a recognized PhD guide in management and commerce, Dr. Maulik has mentored numerous students. His teaching consistently receives high ratings from students at various institutions. Dr. Maulik's profound knowledge and diverse experience greatly enhance his teaching and research, establishing him as a respected authority in academic and professional communities.

**Mob:** +91 9909003239

**E-mail:** maulikresearch123@gmail.com

**Dr. Lavina Chaplot**

Director at Rift Koders

Mob. :- +254 703888606

E-mail :- lavinachaplot93@gmail.com

July 19, 2025

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter, "Solving Problems Together: Beyond the Law Books," explores traditional Indian methods of conflict resolution and positions them within the global discourse on transitional justice. Historically, Indian societies developed dispute settlement mechanisms—such as the **Panchayat System**, **Jati Panchayats**, and **Ancient Trade Guilds (Srenis)**—deeply embedded in their social fabric, prioritizing **dialogue**, **mutual understanding**, and **reconciliation** over formal legal frameworks. These approaches were underpinned by a holistic philosophy emphasizing **Dharma** (righteousness), **Rta** (cosmic order), and **Restorative Justice** (justice that heals), aiming to restore relationships and societal balance.*

*The principles of amicable settlement continue to resonate in contemporary India, most notably in the **Lok Adalat** ("People's Court") system. Lok Adalats offer an informal, speedy, and cost-effective alternative to formal courts, reflecting a pragmatic adaptation of traditional values to manage judicial efficiency and case backlogs.*

*This Indian experience holds valuable insights for the evolving global paradigm of transitional justice, which has shifted from a purely retributive focus to an embrace of holistic, context-specific solutions, officially acknowledging the vital role of indigenous traditions. However, the integration of traditional methods demands a critical lens. While they offer strengths in **accessibility**, **speed**, and **relationship preservation**, they face significant limitations, including potential **gender and caste biases**, **lack of formal legal training**, and challenges with **enforcement**.*

*The chapter concludes that the future of justice lies in a **hybrid model** that thoughtfully combines the strengths of community-based resolution with the safeguards, due process, and enforcement mechanisms of modern legal frameworks, moving justice truly "**Beyond the Law Books**"*

### **I. Introduction: The Enduring Quest for Justice and Harmony**

This chapter undertakes a comprehensive exploration of traditional Indian methods of conflict resolution, positioning them within the broader global discourse on transitional justice. Historically, Indian societies cultivated dispute settlement mechanisms deeply embedded in their social fabric, prioritizing dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation over formal legal frameworks and punitive

measures. This approach offers invaluable insights into community-driven solutions for peaceful coexistence, demonstrating that true justice often extends beyond conventional legal frameworks to embrace collective healing and reconciliation. The universal human need for conflict resolution and the pursuit of justice is a constant across diverse cultures and historical epochs. Conflict, an inherent and often unavoidable aspect of human interaction, necessitates mechanisms to manage disputes, restore order, and achieve a sense of fairness. While modern legal systems provide structured avenues for redress, many societies, particularly those with deep historical roots, have developed nuanced, community-centric approaches. These approaches address disputes not merely as legal infractions but as disruptions to social harmony, aiming to mend the fabric of the community rather than solely punishing individuals.

The premise "Beyond the Law Books" signifies a critical move beyond purely retributive or adversarial legal paradigms. It calls for an exploration of holistic, restorative, and culturally resonant forms of justice that emphasize collective well-being and the repair of relationships. This perspective challenges the conventional view of justice as solely a matter of legal compliance and punishment, advocating instead for a more expansive understanding that integrates moral, social, and spiritual dimensions of conflict resolution.

## **II. Traditional Indian Conflict Resolution: Foundations and Philosophy**

### **Historical Context and Foundational Principles**

Traditional Indian societies fostered dispute settlement mechanisms that were deeply embedded in their social fabric, prioritizing dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation over formal legal frameworks and punitive measures. These approaches were underpinned by a holistic philosophy emphasizing restorative justice, the pursuit of consensus, the preservation of community harmony, and guidance derived from moral and ethical principles. The methods were not merely procedural but were profoundly rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices of indigenous communities, intricately tied to their history, language, and traditions, often transmitted through oral storytelling and cultural practices. Historically, ancient India viewed legal disputes not as isolated technicalities but as disturbances to *Dharma* (righteousness) and the overarching moral and social order. The primary objective of dispute resolution was often to restore relationships and re-establish societal balance. This collective responsibility was reflected in informal mediation, negotiation, and arbitration practices that sought to mend societal rifts. The Rigveda, one of the oldest human texts dating back to 1700 BCE, provides early evidence of self-governing village bodies known as *sabhas*, which subsequently evolved into the more formalized panchayats. This foundational history indicates a long-standing tradition of decentralized, community-led governance and dispute resolution that predates modern state structures and formal legal codifications.

## Philosophical Underpinnings

The traditional Indian approach to conflict resolution is deeply informed by a rich philosophical heritage that emphasizes interconnectedness, moral duty, and the restoration of balance.

### Dharma and Rta

A cornerstone of ancient Indian thought, *Dharma* is a comprehensive concept encompassing morality, law, duty, and justice. It is not a rigid set of prescriptive rules but a dynamic principle that adapts to individual circumstances and societal needs, emphasizing personal responsibility and moral integrity. Within this framework, true justice arises from adherence to one's

*Dharma*. Ancient texts like the Dharma Shastras and Arthashastra viewed law and morality as intertwined, reflecting a holistic view where legal precepts were inseparable from ethical conduct. The sovereign's duty, known as *Rajadharma*, explicitly mandated the upholding of justice and ensuring public welfare.

Complementing *Dharma* is the concept of *Rta*, representing cosmic order and universal law, highlighted as foundational to dispute resolution within Vedic and Upanishadic perspectives. While specific elaborations on *Rta* are limited in the provided material, its consistent mention alongside *Dharma* implies a profound belief in an inherent, universal order that human justice systems should strive to reflect and maintain. The emphasis on restoring this cosmic and social equilibrium through justice mechanisms suggests that traditional Indian systems were not merely about adjudicating guilt and punishment but about returning society to a state of moral and cosmic harmony. This focus on a holistic restoration of order, rather than just individual culpability, marks a fundamental philosophical divergence from many Western retributive legal models.

### Restorative Justice (Justice that Heals)

Unlike Western legal frameworks that often prioritize punitive measures, ancient Indian law, deeply influenced by *Dharma*, emphasized restorative justice, focusing on the reintegration of individuals into society. This spiritual perspective advocated for a law that fosters harmony and balance within the community. Restorative justice aims to repair, restore, reconcile, and reintegrate offenders and victims to each other and their shared communities. It embraces core values such as healing, compassion, mercy, mediation, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The primary goal is to address and repair the harm caused by an offense, working towards restoring the well-being of both the victim and the broader community. This approach suggests that traditional Indian justice inherently sought to address the *root causes* of conflict and the *social fabric* disrupted by it, rather than just the overt legal transgression. This contrasts sharply with purely retributive systems that often focus narrowly on culpability and punishment, underscoring that for justice to be truly holistic and effective, particularly in contexts of deep societal

division or historical trauma, the "why" a conflict occurred and "how to heal" the affected community are as important as determining "who" is responsible and "what" happened. This offers a valuable blueprint for contemporary justice systems struggling with issues like recidivism, societal polarization, and the limitations of punitive measures in achieving lasting peace.

### **Dialogue (Samvada), Mutual Understanding, and Consensus**

The Vedic society believed conflicts could be resolved through discussions and the mediation of respected elders or spiritual leaders. The Upanishads further emphasized *Satyam* (truth) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) as essential principles for maintaining social harmony. Deliberative dialogue is seen as crucial for fostering improved communication, building relationships, and enhancing understanding between conflicting parties, thereby forming the basis for constructive social coexistence. This emphasis on dialogue and consensus suggests that these systems aimed to foster an environment where conflicts were ideally avoided or de-escalated early, rather than just managed after they erupted. This implies that traditional Indian methods were not just reactive dispute resolution mechanisms but were deeply integrated into the social fabric to maintain harmony and prevent conflicts from escalating. This 'culture of peace' aspect is a critical takeaway for modern peacebuilding, which often focuses solely on post-conflict interventions.

### **Reconciliation and Community Harmony**

Reconciliation was intrinsically linked to the concept of "social harmony," aiming to permanently eradicate the roots of conflict between parties and reconstruct their relationships in an improved form. Indigenous conflict resolution practices consistently prioritize healing, reconciliation, and the restoration of community harmony, focusing on restoring balance within the community and recognizing the interconnectedness of individuals, families, and communities. This profound influence of ancient Indian philosophies like *Dharma* and *Ahimsa* on the concept of justice as healing and reconciliation, rather than purely retributive, is a defining characteristic. *Dharma* provides the moral and cosmic framework for a just society, where conflict resolution aims to restore universal and social order. *Ahimsa*, the principle of non-violence, further reinforces the non-punitive, compassionate aspect, actively pushing towards mending broken relationships and fostering empathy. This philosophical grounding distinguishes the Indian approach from many Western retributive models.

### **III. Key Traditional Institutions and Mechanisms**

Traditional Indian society developed a multi-layered and interconnected system of justice, where various institutions played distinct yet complementary roles in conflict resolution. This highly localized and context-specific application of justice often saw the most appropriate forum chosen based on the nature of the dispute and the parties involved.

## 1. The Venerable Panchayat System

The Panchayat raj is one of the oldest systems of local government in the Indian subcontinent, with historical mentions dating back to around 250 CE. The word 'panchayat' literally means 'assembly of five' (*panch*), traditionally consisting of wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community. These assemblies resolved a wide array of civil and minor criminal disputes between individuals and villages. Historically, they held significant executive and judicial powers, including distributing land and collecting taxes on behalf of the village.

The Panchayat system faced significant disruption during British colonial rule. The East India Company systematically dismantled it in 1765, abolishing village land record offices and village police, which profoundly disempowered the village community and contributed to severe famines. While subsequent British attempts to restore some powers after 1857 were made, they did not fully restore the lost authority of the village community. Post-independence, Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated for Panchayat Raj as the foundation of India's political system, envisioning *Gram Swaraj* ("village self-governance"). This vision was eventually formalized with the inauguration of the Panchayati Raj system by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1959 and its institutionalization through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, which established a three-tier structure and mandated reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women, aiming for decentralized self-governance.

### Village Sabhas (Gram Sabhas)

The Gram Sabha represents the general assembly of all registered voters within a village, serving as a vital mechanism for direct participation in local governance. Defined under Article 243(b) in Part IX of the Indian Constitution, it is a cornerstone of the Panchayati Raj system, enabling participatory democracy at the grassroots. Its functions include overseeing and approving the Gram Panchayat's budget, auditing financial reports, and sanctioning development plans, thereby promoting transparency and accountability within the village administration. Crucially, the Gram Sabha also plays a role in addressing minor disputes and grievances within the community, acting as a forum for local issues to be raised and collectively resolved. This direct participation is intended to empower villagers in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of collective ownership over community welfare and development.

### Jati Panchayats (Caste Councils)

Distinct from the statutory Gram Panchayats, Jati Panchayats are caste-specific councils of elders that follow caste-based social norms, rules, and religious values to settle conflicts among their own members. These councils primarily adjudicated disputes involving caste members in open meetings, addressing issues such as managing temples and schools, property disputes, marital relations, and breaches of community rules, such as extravagant spending on weddings or adherence to

specific dietary norms. Penalties imposed by these bodies traditionally included monetary fines, the requirement to offer a feast to cast members or Brahmins, temporary or permanent excommunication from the caste, and occasionally pilgrimage or self-humiliation. While physical punishment was levied on occasion, it is now uncommon. These caste panchayats existed as a form of local governance much before the formal establishment of Gram Panchayats. Despite the passage of the Evidence Act in 1872, which allowed caste members to take cases to civil or criminal courts, Jati Panchayats continue to exist and exert leadership roles within their respective groups, indicating their enduring cultural and social influence.

The continued existence and evolution of Jati Panchayats, even after the British dismantled the formal Panchayat system and introduced Western legal frameworks, highlight the remarkable resilience and adaptability of deeply embedded informal systems. This enduring power of community-based governance and dispute resolution, even in the face of colonial disruption, implies that "traditional" is not a static concept but a dynamic hybrid, constantly negotiating with external forces. This has profound implications for transitional justice, suggesting that externally imposed solutions might fail if they do not acknowledge and integrate these resilient local dynamics.

### **Role of Family Elders, Religious Leaders, and Spiritual Gurus**

In Indian society, religious and spiritual practices are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric, transcending generations through familial, societal, and institutional influences. Family elders, particularly parents and grandparents, play a crucial role in imparting religious knowledge and practices, introducing children to rituals, prayers, and festivals, and fostering a strong sense of communal participation and belonging. Beyond the household, religious institutions such as temples, mosques, churches, and gurdwaras are central to religious life, providing spaces for collective worship and religious education.

Specialists, community leaders, and particularly family elders, religious leaders, and spiritual gurus, play a vital role in resolving disputes due to the high degree of trust and belief placed in their guidance by the community. Religious leaders and diplomats are considered crucial in effective mediation, often preventing conflicts from escalating into broader disputes. Culture and religion profoundly impact the mediation system, as diverse communities hold distinct beliefs and values that shape their approach to conflict. Mediators who are culturally aware and sensitive to religious nuances are more effective in helping disputants from diverse backgrounds reach mutually agreeable resolutions, sometimes even seeking assistance from religious interpreters or consultants. Notably, some Indian communities are characterized by an introspective nature, finding peace through self-reflection and accepting the decisions of elders, often practicing "total

acceptance". This informal yet powerful influence of social capital and moral authority underscores the cultural embeddedness of conflict resolution in India.

### **Informal Community-Based Arbitration and Mediation (Ancient Trade Guilds/Srenis)**

In ancient India, *Srenis*, or trade guilds, were influential associations of artisans, merchants, and traders that played a significant role in shaping the economy and society from approximately 600 BCE to 1200 CE. These guilds were primarily formed to protect the interests and promote the economic well-being of their members, regulating trade practices, controlling prices, and maintaining quality standards. Beyond their economic functions, *Srenis* also served as a crucial part of the administrative machinery, engaging in dispute resolution and tax collection.

Crucially, *Srenis* had their own internal courts to settle disputes among their members, enforcing trade regulations and resolving conflicts efficiently, thereby reducing the need for external intervention. The *Shrenis* were highly structured, akin to modern corporations, with democratic governance mechanisms and well-defined internal processes for conflict resolution. They operated under guiding principles known as "Shreni Dharma," which were rigorously debated, reached by consensus, and then submitted to the monarch for symbolic approval, ensuring adherence to ethical business standards. Members had clear avenues for grievance redressal, including appealing to the monarch or the democratic general assembly, which held the authority to remove executive officers when necessary. This system fostered trust and accountability within the trading community, showcasing early forms of self-governance and a sophisticated blend of economic and judicial functions.

The existence of such diverse traditional institutions — Panchayats (village-level), Gram Sabhas (direct democracy), Jati Panchayats (caste-specific), family/religious leaders (interpersonal/moral), and *Srenis* (professional/commercial) — reveals a multi-layered approach to justice. This complex, interwoven structure suggests a sophisticated understanding of social dynamics, where different types of disputes required different forms of resolution, often leveraging existing social capital and relationships. It highlights the organic evolution of justice mechanisms in response to diverse societal needs, a stark contrast to a monolithic, state-imposed legal system.

This table provides a concise, comparative overview of the diverse traditional institutions. It visually clarifies their distinct roles, structures, and underlying principles, which is essential for understanding the multi-faceted nature of Indian traditional justice. It also helps to differentiate between the various forms of traditional governance and

**Table 1: Traditional Indian Conflict Resolution Institutions**

their specific contributions to dispute resolution, making complex information accessible and structured for the reader.

**IV. Modern Echoes: The Spirit of Traditional Justice in Contemporary India**

The principles of amicable settlement and community-driven resolution, deeply ingrained in India's historical fabric, continue to resonate in contemporary legal initiatives. The most prominent example of this continuity is the Lok Adalat system.

**Lok Adalat’s: Origin and Principles**

Lok Adalat’s, meaning "People's Court," are a core and effective part of India's justice system, offering an informal, speedy, and cost-effective alternative to traditional court processes. The concept is deeply rooted in India's ancient tradition

<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>Structure/Composition</b>	<b>Primary Functions in Conflict Resolution</b>	<b>Key Principles/Focus</b>
Panchayat System	Councils of respected elders	Arbitrate civil/minor criminal disputes, maintain social order	Dialogue, consensus, community harmony, restorative justice
Village Sabhas (Gram Sabhas)	Assembly of all registered voters	Address minor disputes/grievances, oversee governance	Participatory democracy, transparency, accountability
Jati Panchayats (Caste Councils)	Caste-specific juries of elders	Settle inter-caste conflicts, enforce caste norms	Caste norms, religious values
Family Elders/Religious Leaders/Spiritual Gurus	Individuals with moral/social authority	Mediation, promoting reconciliation	Cultural/religious influence, interpersonal relations, trust
Ancient Trade Guilds (Srenis)	Associations of artisans/merchants/traders	Resolve commercial disputes, enforce trade regulations	Ethical business practices, internal mechanisms

of village panchayats and Gandhian principles of mediation. The modern Lok Adalat movement began in Gujarat in 1982 as a voluntary initiative, with the first-ever Lok Adalat held in Una, Junagadh district. Its success led the Government of India to pass the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, which formalized Lok Adalat's and integrated them into India's legal system, establishing NALSA and other legal services authorities to organize them regularly.

Lok Adalat's operate on principles of natural justice, emphasizing flexibility and informality rather than strictly implementing procedural codes like the Code of Civil Procedure or Criminal Procedure Code. Their main focus is on resolving civil and compoundable criminal disputes through compromise, settlements, mediation, negotiation, and reconciliation. A significant advantage is that they do not require court fees, and any initial fees paid in regular courts are refunded if a case is settled in a Lok Adalat, making justice more accessible. Various types exist, including Permanent Lok Adalat's (primarily for public utility services), National Lok Adalat's (for mass disposal of cases), State, and Mobile Lok Adalat's (to deliver justice to marginalized people in remote areas). The introduction of E-Lok Adalat's in 2020 further increased accessibility through virtual hearings, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Examples of Lok Adalat's' Success**

The inaugural Lok Adalat in Una, Gujarat, was a remarkable success, resolving many disputes daily, including labour disputes, family matters, and bank loan recovery cases, thereby demonstrating the viability of amicable settlements outside formal courts. This success inspired other states and legal authorities to replicate the model, showcasing the effectiveness of people-driven justice at the grassroots. Lok Adalat's have found particular success in specific areas such as motor accident compensation cases, matrimonial disputes, and cheque bouncing cases, where the emphasis on compromise and reconciliation is highly beneficial. They have significantly reduced the burden on formal courts, preventing millions of cases from entering the judicial system. For instance, in August 2022, over one crore cases were settled in a single day across India, yielding substantial settlement amounts. This widespread success highlights how the modern state's adoption of these 'traditional' principles is largely a pragmatic response to the overwhelming caseload and delays within the formal judicial system. While presented as a continuity of traditional values, the formalization of Lok Adalat's also represents a strategic adaptation by the state to manage judicial efficiency. This raises an important question: are Lok Adalat's primarily a means of preserving traditional justice, or are they a mechanism to offload the formal system's burden, potentially at the expense of deeper, community-driven reconciliation? This question is crucial for evaluating their long-term effectiveness and fidelity to traditional ethos.

Despite their successes, Lok Adalat's face a critical challenge related to enforcement. Although a Lok Adalat decision is legally equivalent to a civil court order, respondents sometimes disregard the outcomes because the proceedings do not carry harsh consequences, leading to a decline in trustworthiness. This reveals a critical weakness in the hybrid model: the informal, compromise-based approach, while fostering reconciliation, may lack the coercive power of formal courts, leading to enforcement gaps. Without effective enforcement, the perceived "swift justice" can become "denied justice" if settlements are not honoured, undermining public trust and the very purpose of these alternative forums. This suggests that the success of integrating traditional methods into modern legal frameworks is contingent not just on their philosophical alignment but also on robust enforcement mechanisms.

## **V. Global Discourse on Transitional Justice: A Comparative Lens**

The global understanding and application of justice in post-conflict or transitional societies have undergone a significant evolution, moving from a narrow focus on retribution to a broader, more holistic approach that increasingly acknowledges the value of indigenous and informal traditions.

### **Evolution of Transitional Justice Paradigms**

The origins of transitional justice can be traced back to the post-World War II period in Europe, with the establishment of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and the trials of Japanese soldiers at the Tokyo Tribunal. These trials marked the genesis of transitional justice by asserting individual criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity, representing a departure from responses based solely on power politics. The moral weight of their judgments fostered a new vision of moral responsibility among nations, influencing future international and domestic responses to human rights violations. The era from post-World War II to the mid-1980s was largely characterized by a tendency to "close the books" on grave human rights abuses through silence, amnesia, or formal amnesty, despite early legal foundations for accountability laid by international conventions and tribunals. However, a significant policy shift from the mid-1980s onwards saw the rise of a global human rights culture, leading to a robust fight against impunity. This era witnessed the establishment of international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR), and the International Criminal Court (ICC), alongside the spread of universal jurisdiction, often mandating retributive justice in peace agreements. This evolution in transitional justice reflects a maturation of the field, moving from an idealistic "duty to prosecute" to a more realistic understanding that different contexts require different tools.

## **Critical Questions and Alternative Mechanisms**

The increasing emphasis on systematic prosecutions, however, prompted critical questions regarding their applicability and potential impact in delicate post-conflict transitions. Local leaders and civil society raised concerns about political, social, economic, and cultural contingencies that might impede fulfilling a strict duty to prosecute, recognizing that rigid legalistic approaches could destabilize fragile peace processes. This led to a search for alternative or complementary mechanisms, epitomized by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which championed "amnesty for truth". The TRC model, which prioritized truth-telling and reconciliation over blanket punishment, became a symbol of this broader approach. The emerging consensus favoured a combination of measures—including limited amnesty, vetting of public officials, truth commissions, and selective trials—reflecting a move from a dichotomy of impunity or trials to multiple conceptions of justice and reconciliation. This shift embraced a wider array of state and non-state, legal, semi-judicial, and non-judicial techniques, acknowledging that justice can manifest in various forms beyond punitive trials, including truth-seeking, reparations, and institutional reform.

## **Official Acknowledgment of Indigenous and Informal Traditions**

Crucially, this development led to an official acknowledgment by international bodies, like the United Nations, of the vital role of indigenous and informal traditions in administering justice. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted in 2007, is a significant instrument that emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures, and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations. Article 40 of UNDRIP specifically states that indigenous peoples have the right to fair procedures for the resolution of conflicts and disputes. The UN's approach to transitional justice now explicitly includes both judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms, recognizing the need to account for the root causes of conflict, identify vulnerable groups, and consider the unique country context when designing and implementing transitional justice measures. This recognition represents a significant shift from an earlier, more universalist approach to justice, acknowledging that local and traditional practices can offer legitimate and effective pathways to reconciliation and accountability.

However, this acknowledgment also brings a foundational tension: how do universal standards of human rights (e.g., non-discrimination, due process) reconcile with indigenous justice traditions that may historically have had limitations, such as gender or caste biases? While UNDRIP affirms the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination and to maintain their own institutions, the broader UN framework for transitional justice also emphasizes compliance with international human rights law and the duty to investigate and prosecute gross violations. This highlights a critical challenge for the application of traditional justice in transitional contexts: the need to balance cultural preservation and self-

determination with adherence to evolving international human rights norms. Any integration of traditional methods must be critically assessed to ensure they do not perpetuate historical injustices, necessitating a dynamic and adaptive approach rather than a romanticized one.

**Table 2: Evolution of Global Transitional Justice Paradigms**

Era/Period	Dominant Approach	Key Mechanisms	Underlying Philosophy	Shift/Innovation	Current Trend
Post-WWII to Mid-1980s	"Closing the books," Formal Amnesty, Criminal Justice	International Military Tribunals (Nuremberg, Tokyo), De-Nazification programs, Trials of military juntas (Greece, Argentina)	Retributive justice, accountability for war crimes, human rights promotion	N/A	N/A
Mid-1980s Onwards (Rise of Human Rights Culture)	Fight against impunity, establishment of international tribunals	International Criminal Tribunals (ICTY, ICTR), International Criminal Court (ICC), Universal Jurisdiction	Robust fight against impunity, mandatory retributive justice in peace agreements	Introduction of Truth Commissions (South Africa TRC - "amnesty for truth"), Lustration programs	N/A
Emerging Consensus (Post-TRC Era)	Combination of measures, multiple conceptions of justice and reconciliation	Limited amnesty, vetting, truth commissions, selective trials, state and non-state, legal, semi-judicial, and non-judicial techniques	Holistic justice, context-specific approaches, official UN acknowledgment of indigenous traditions	N/A	Combination of measures, official UN acknowledgment of indigenous traditions

This table provides a clear, chronological overview of the evolution of transitional justice. It effectively illustrates the shift from a narrow, retributive focus to a broader, more holistic and context-sensitive approach. By highlighting key mechanisms and underlying philosophies across different periods, it allows for a quick understanding of the intellectual and practical journey of the field, setting

the stage for a nuanced discussion of where traditional Indian methods fit into this global dialogue.

## **VI. Navigating Complexities: Challenges and Strengths of Traditional Indian Methods**

Traditional Indian methods of conflict resolution, while offering significant benefits, are not without their complexities and limitations. A comprehensive understanding requires a critical assessment of both their inherent strengths and the challenges they face, particularly when viewed through a modern human rights lens.

### **Challenges**

The term "traditional" itself is problematic, as these institutions are dynamic hybrids, constantly altered by factors like colonization, modernization, and conflict. The imposition of Western legal systems often undermined traditional Indigenous practices, creating a dual system of governance that sidelined existing approaches. This historical context highlights that "tradition" is not static but a constantly evolving construct, shaped by power dynamics and external influences. Methodological pitfalls, particularly ethnocentrism and the romanticization of these practices, can hinder a nuanced understanding. Ethnocentrism can lead to outsiders, such as jurors in a legal context, adopting the dominant culture's worldview, potentially leading to poor outcomes or misinterpretations for those from different cultural backgrounds. This underscores the critical importance of local authors and flexible research approaches to capture their nuanced realities, avoiding idealized portrayals.

Traditional systems, while relying on respected elders, may lack formal legal training, which can lead to inconsistent application of principles or susceptibility to local pressures [User Query]. This absence of formal training can sometimes result in decisions that are not aligned with codified legal standards. Furthermore, these methods, especially modern adaptations like Lok Adalat's, can face challenges in enforcement. Respondents may disregard outcomes due to a lack of harsh consequences, leading to a decline in trustworthiness and undermining the efficacy of the resolution. They also often have a limited reach, unable to handle serious criminal offenses, constitutional matters, or complex legal issues, thus restricting their ability to provide comprehensive justice. This reveals a fundamental paradox: the very characteristics that make traditional systems appealing (flexibility, community-driven, less adversarial) can also be their Achilles' heel in terms of formal legal efficacy and protection against entrenched biases. This suggests that any successful integration requires careful calibration of informality with necessary formal safeguards, rather than a wholesale adoption.

Perhaps the most significant challenge lies in addressing historical gender and caste biases deeply embedded within some traditional systems. Indian law has been profoundly influenced by gender stereotypes, reinforcing patriarchal norms against

women and LGBTQ+ individuals. Family law, including the Hindu Marriage Act and Muslim personal law, often perpetuates traditional gender roles and presumptions of male financial responsibility. Criminal law, such as the marital rape exception in IPC Section 375, has historically upheld patriarchal ideas of spousal entitlement, leaving married women without legal recourse for sexual violence. Custody battles frequently favor mothers by default, reflecting societal assumptions rather than individual circumstances. Similarly, workplace laws can reinforce gendered caregiving roles, as seen in the disparity between maternity and paternity leave provisions.

Caste bias remains a pervasive issue. The descent-based, hereditary caste system has historically justified inhuman and degrading treatment of millions, reinforcing divisions in housing, marriage, and employment through social ostracism, economic boycotts, and physical violence. Atrocities committed by land-holding upper castes against Dalits are prevalent, and the formal justice system itself has been affected by hostile witnesses, police inaction, and prejudice in such cases, leading to acquittals even in severe instances of violence. While Jati Panchayats are traditional mechanisms, they have historically enforced caste-based norms and imposed penalties, sometimes reinforcing existing inequalities rather than challenging them. This deep-seated challenge of social hierarchy in traditional justice is a crucial counter-narrative to any romanticization of traditional justice. It highlights that "community harmony" can sometimes come at the cost of individual rights, particularly for marginalized groups. For transitional justice, this means that simply reverting to "traditional" mechanisms without critical reform and oversight risks re-entrenching the very injustices that led to conflict or human rights abuses. A nuanced approach is required, focusing on which aspects of tradition are beneficial and how they can be adapted to uphold universal human rights.

### **Strengths**

Despite these challenges, traditional Indian methods offer compelling strengths that make them valuable models for conflict resolution.

### **Accessibility and Affordability**

Traditional methods, and their modern adaptations like Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Lok Adalat's, are often more accessible and cost-effective than formal litigation, making justice available to a wider population, especially in rural and remote areas. Lok Adalat's, for instance, do not require court fees, and any initial fees paid in regular courts are refunded if a case is settled, significantly reducing financial barriers to justice. This contrasts sharply with the formal Indian legal system, where justice can be expensive and inaccessible for the common person, with trials sometimes lasting for decades.

### **Speed and Efficiency**

ADR methods are recognized for their ability to reduce court backlogs and ensure speedy dispensation of justice. Lok Adalat's prioritize rapid resolution, particularly for family conflicts, motor accident claims, and cheque bouncing cases, contributing to a significant reduction in the burden on formal courts. The emphasis on amicable settlement and compromise inherently streamlines the process compared to adversarial litigation.

### **Contextual Understanding and Cultural Relevance**

Elders and community members involved in traditional resolution possess deep contextual understanding of local situations, language, conventions, and practices. These systems are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices of indigenous communities, making them highly relevant and legitimate within their specific contexts. Cultural fluency is a key factor in successful mediation within these systems, as mediators can navigate complex social dynamics and underlying cultural forces that shape disputes. This localized understanding allows for solutions that are not only legally sound but also socially acceptable and sustainable.

### **Ability to Preserve Relationships and Empower Communities**

A defining characteristic of traditional methods is their emphasis on healing and reconciliation rather than punishment or retribution. They focus on restoring balance and harmony within the community, viewing conflict as a disruption to social equilibrium that requires mending relationships. ADR methods are based on collaboration, not confrontation, making it easier for parties to maintain or even enhance relationships once a dispute has been resolved. Furthermore, by involving community members and elders in decision-making, these systems empower villagers and foster a sense of collective responsibility for conflict resolution and community welfare.

**Table 3: Strengths and Limitations of Traditional Indian Conflict Resolution Methods**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Strengths</b>	Accessibility	Easily reachable, often located within communities, reducing travel and logistical burdens.
	Affordability	Low or no cost involved, making justice available to a wider population, especially the economically disadvantaged.
	Speed/Efficiency	Faster resolution of disputes compared to formal courts, reducing backlogs and ensuring timely justice.

Category	Aspect	Description
	Contextual Understanding	Deep local knowledge of social dynamics, cultural norms, and individual histories, leading to more relevant and accepted solutions.
	Relationship Preservation	Focus on healing, collaboration, and reconciliation, aiming to mend relationships rather than exacerbate conflict through adversarial processes.
	Community Empowerment	Direct participation of community members and elders in decision-making, fostering local ownership and self-governance.
<b>Limitations</b>	Lack of Formal Training/Bias	Potential for inconsistent application of principles due to absence of formal legal training; susceptibility to local pressures or personal biases of mediators.
	Limited Enforcement	Decisions may be disregarded due to lack of coercive power or formal enforcement mechanisms, leading to a decline in trustworthiness.
	Inability to Handle Complex Cases	Restricted scope, often unable to address serious criminal offenses, constitutional matters, or intricate legal issues requiring specialized expertise.
	Historical Gender Biases	Tendency to perpetuate patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, leading to unequal treatment for women and LGBTQ+ individuals in family and criminal matters.
	Historical Caste Biases	Reinforcement of social stratification and discrimination, with instances of violence and compromised justice against marginalized caste groups.

This table provides a clear, side-by-side comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of traditional methods. It helps to present a balanced and critical assessment, as required by the query. By explicitly listing both strengths and limitations, it allows the reader to quickly grasp the complexities and trade-offs involved in relying on or integrating these systems, especially in the context of transitional justice where human rights considerations are paramount.

## VII. Conclusion: Beyond Law Books – Insights for Global Justice

Traditional Indian methods of conflict resolution offer invaluable insights into community-driven solutions for peaceful coexistence. Their emphasis on *Dharma*, restorative justice, dialogue, and reconciliation provide a powerful counterpoint to purely retributive legal models, highlighting a philosophical approach where justice is viewed as a means to heal and restore societal balance, rather than solely to punish. The resilience and adaptability of institutions like Panchayats and ancient trade guilds (Srenis) demonstrate the enduring power of local governance and dispute resolution, even in the face of external impositions like colonization. These systems, far from being static, have shown a remarkable capacity to evolve and persist, underscoring the deep cultural roots of community-based justice.

Modern initiatives in India, such as the Lok Adalat's, represent a pragmatic attempt to formalize these traditional principles. They address the overburdened formal justice system while maintaining an ethos of amicable settlement, offering accessible, affordable, and speedy dispute resolution. This adaptation reflects a strategic effort by the state to leverage traditional values for contemporary judicial efficiency.

The Indian experience resonates strongly with the global discourse on transitional justice. The evolution of transitional justice paradigms, from a post-World War II focus on retributive trials to a broader embrace of alternative and complementary mechanisms, mirrors the traditional Indian emphasis on reconciliation and holistic healing. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "amnesty for truth" model, for instance, echoes the restorative and reconciliation-focused aspects inherent in traditional Indian approaches, demonstrating a global convergence towards more nuanced forms of justice that extend beyond conventional legal frameworks. The official acknowledgment by international bodies like the UN of the vital role of indigenous and informal traditions in administering justice further validates this shift, recognizing the importance of context-specific solutions that respect local cultures and institutions. However, the integration of traditional wisdom into modern justice systems, whether in India or globally, requires a critical lens. While their strengths—accessibility, speed, contextual understanding, and relationship preservation—are undeniable, their limitations, particularly historical biases related to gender and caste, must be actively mitigated. The challenges faced by Gram Sabhas, such as irregular meetings and lack of participation and enforcement, and by Lok Adalat's, including issues with enforcement and limited jurisdictional reach, highlight the complexities of formalizing informal systems and the imperative for robust institutional support and oversight. These difficulties underscore that simply adopting traditional models without addressing their inherent vulnerabilities risks perpetuating existing power imbalances and injustices.

For contemporary justice systems and peacebuilding efforts globally, the Indian experience underscores the importance of context-specific approaches in transitional justice. A "one-size-fits-all" model based solely on retributive justice may be insufficient or counterproductive in diverse cultural settings. Future approaches to justice, particularly in post-conflict or transitional societies, could benefit immensely from a hybrid model that thoughtfully combines the strengths of traditional, community-based resolution with the safeguards, due process, and enforcement mechanisms of modern legal frameworks. This involves fostering continuous dialogue between formal and informal systems, promoting legal literacy within traditional bodies, and ensuring that traditional practices evolve to align with universal human rights standards. The ultimate goal is not to romanticize the past but to learn from its successes and failures, building more inclusive, effective, and culturally resonant pathways to justice and lasting peace.

### **Important Books**

Pereira, Melvil, Bitopi Dutta, and Binita Kakati, eds. *Legal Pluralism and Indian Democracy: Tribal Conflict Resolution Systems in Northeast India*. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Jois, M. Rama. *Ancient Indian Law - Eternal Values in Manu Smriti*. 1st ed. New Delhi: LexisNexis, 2015.

Huyse, Luc, and Mark Salter, eds. *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*. Stockholm: International IDEA, 2008.

Kapoor, Kapil, and Avadhesh K. Singh, eds. *Indian Knowledge Systems*. Vol. 1. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2005.

Altekar, A. S. *State and Government in Ancient India*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2017.

### **Journal Article and Volume:**

Kilara, Ameya. "Facing the Demons of the Past: Transitional Justice in Gujarat." *Socio-Legal Review* 3, no. 1 (2022): 87–116. doi:10.55496/RTGK2136.

Huyse, Luc, and Mark Salter, eds. *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*. Stockholm: International IDEA, 2008.

Davis, Donald R., Jr. "Law and 'Law Books' in the Hindu Tradition." *German Law Journal* 9, no. 3 (2008): 307–328.

Somaru, Navilla, and Christa Rautenbach. "The Indian Approach to Criminal Justice: The Role of Traditional Courts as Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms." *Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa* 53, no. 2 (2020): 294–333.

**Dr. Lavina Chaplot** is a distinguished legal expert and dynamic leader with a strong track record in India and Kenya, blending rigorous **legal scholarship** with entrepreneurial drive.

Her academic foundation includes a **Ph.D. in Law** specializing in Jain community family laws, an **LL.M. in Corporate Law**, and an **M.Com.** She successfully served as **Head of the Department of Law** and Assistant Professor at Mewar University, noted for her **leadership in university compliance (NAAC, BCI)** and her award as the **Best Discipline Teacher of the Year (2022)**.

In Kenya, she is a business leader as the **Founder of Pinnacle Rift Supplies** and **Director of Rift Koders**, where she oversees academic and curriculum design, notably securing **three copyrights** for the coding institute. She is deeply committed to civic life in Nakuru, serving as a **Lion Member** and committee convenor for the Lions Club and as **Secretary for the Kenya Horticulture Society**. She exemplifies a rare combination of legal depth, academic administration, and impactful business and community service.

## 34. Indian Knowledge System & Management

**Preetam U Revankar**

*Assistant Professor  
KLS's Raja Lakhamgouda Law College,  
Belagavi, Karnataka.*

**Tanvi P Revankar**

*Guest Lecturer  
KLS's Gogte College of Commerce,  
Belagavi, Karnataka.*

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### **Abstract**

*It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of conserving and disseminating our Indian knowledge systems in a world that is becoming more and more uncertain, especially those that have their roots in India's rich cultural legacy. One must have roots in their own culture and traditions in order to be a global citizen. "Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye" (True knowledge is that which liberates) – 'Vishnupurana'.*

*The ageless wisdom found in ancient Indian texts captures the profound meaning of education as a process that transforms character, upholds moral leadership, and enhances holistic development rather than only serving as a means for students to achieve their objectives. Current neuroscience research emphasizes the cognitive advantages of studying Indian knowledge systems, highlighting its applicability to contemporary education<sup>459</sup>. The phrase Indian Knowledge System (IKS) brings up a wealth of ancient wisdom and philosophical ideas in the field of management, tying together strands of tradition, culture, and modern practice. Incorporating notions like Dharma (righteousness) into corporate governance encourages ethical decision-making, ensuring that organizations traverse the complexity of the modern world with integrity. As we traverse the challenges of a fast changing global market, the wisdom embedded in the Indian Knowledge System provides invaluable insights for modern management. Incorporating these ideas into our corporate culture has the potential to trigger a shift in our perception of success, driving us toward a more inclusive and responsible business model. By doing so, we not only honor our legacy, but also pave the way for a future in which management goes beyond profit and focuses on purpose.*

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<sup>459</sup> International Journal of Enhanced Research in Educational Development (IJERED) ISSN: 2320-8708, Vol. 12 Issue 4, July-August, 2024.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Contemporary Education, Indian Knowledge System, Leadership, Modern Management.*

## **Introduction**

The Indian traditional knowledge system is unique and has timeless relevance. Throughout history, ancient Indian knowledge has been divided into numerous divisions. Diagnosing knowledge and determining its relevance for sustainability is becoming increasingly important. This would support our efforts to promote human welfare. India has traditionally fostered human dreams and aspirations. Science, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, religion, and astronomy may all have origins in India. India is often referred to be ‘the cradle of human civilization,’ ‘the mother of speech,’ ‘the grandmother of stories and customs,’ and other titles.

India is a truly unique country. Each state has own culture, clothes, food, environment, and natural features. The culture of India remains a common component throughout all Indian religions. India is home to the world's oldest living culture. Many civilizations and cultures reached their peak but no longer exist. They are either not alive or have not been practiced. Indian culture's strength stems from its foundation. Knowledge is rich in Indian culture and fundamental to Indian culture and civilization. Over time, knowledge of several subjects has become institutionalized through disciplines like as ‘Vidya’ (Knowledge) and Crafts (‘Kala’). Indian disciplines span philosophy, architecture, grammar, mathematics, astronomy, metrics, sociology (dharma-sastra), economy and polity (artha-sastra), ethics (nitis-astra), geography, logic, military science, weaponry, agriculture, mining, trade and commerce, metallurgy, shipbuilding, medicine, poetics, biology, and veterinary science. Despite severe loss and damage, a cumulative collection of texts remains available.

The tradition refers to 18 major ‘Vidyas’ (theoretical disciplines) and 64 ‘Kalas’ (applied or vocational disciplines, crafts). In ancient India, the 18 sciences included the four Vedas, four subsidiary Vedas – (‘Ayurveda’ i.e medicine, ‘Dhanurveda’ i.e weaponry, ‘Gandharvaveda’ i.e music, and ‘Silpa’ i.e architecture), Purana, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Dharmasastra, and Vedanga, as well as six auxiliary sciences (phonetics, grammar, metre, astronomy, ritual, and philology). In the applied sciences, there are 14 competing enumerations<sup>460</sup> out of 64. These "crafts" have a significant impact on daily living in India and are still widely practiced today. Craftsmen consider their skill to be both a job and a kind of worship. These crafts were taught, and continue to be taught, by a teacher to his students, because learning a craft entails seeing the master at work, beginning with odd, small assignments provided by the teacher and progressing to extensive practice, ‘abhyasa’, on one's own. Only after extensive experience does the learner polish

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<sup>460</sup> By Sri Basavarajendra in Sivattattvaratnakara, Vatsyayana in Kamasutra, Sridharasvami in his commentary on Srimadbhagavata, 10.45.64 and Sukracaraya in Sukraniti.

his art and can start up on his own. We can see this even today in Indian dance, music, and even automotive repair, which must now be classified as a craft.

Traditional lists, such as Sribasavarajendra's list, include history, poetry, calligraphy, metrical compositions, dancing, evaluating precious stones, wrestling, cooking, magic, shoe-making, thieving, iron smithery, painting, gardening, carpentry, hair-dressing, hunting, trading, agriculture, animal husbandry, medicine-making, leather work, driving, fishing, and speech-making. Other lists include singing, playing musical instruments, preparing manuscripts, garland-making, dyeing, body-care, using weapons, making moulds, performing puja (daily worship), inlay work, arranging flowers, preparing scents, bangle-making, stitching, making ornaments, making sweets, home-planning, training animals and birds, coding, making instruments/machines, memory training, physical exercise, and yogic practices. It's easy to recognize their tight connection to everyday life. It is also clear that these crafts remain an important source of income.

The enumeration reflects realism, as gambling and thievery are also considered "arts." It is noteworthy that the Indian tradition makes no distinction between "art" and "craft."

The craftsman is highly regarded as a "sadhaka", a devotee whose mind is deeply attached to his object. His training is a sort of tapa, or dedication, and the key virtue he must develop is focus, ekagrata.<sup>461</sup> Even the crafts, which are "practical" fields, have basic texts, such as the popular prosody text 'Pingala'. However, it is true in the case of crafts, as well as in the case of 'Vidyas', that knowledge dwells in the instructor, guru, or "ustad", as the term is today used by the common man.

## Importance

The ideals of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," which means "the entire world is a family," and "Sarve Bhavanthu Sukinah," which means "may everyone be happy," have their roots in the Vedas. Since our forefathers went to such lengths to protect it, perhaps we should shift our focus from preservation to use. The goal of making Bharat a hub for cutting-edge research will be accomplished.

Indian knowledge encompasses various disciplines such as astronomy, ayurveda, yoga, mathematics, computing, language and linguistics, metalworking, 'Rashi-shastra' (Indian astrology), public administration, military technology, and management science. Indians have made significant contributions to various fields such as astronomy, botany, medicine, linguistics, and administration. They are known for their understanding of planetary motions, the solar system, and the Earth's shape and diameter, as well as their knowledge of plant and herb properties. They also invented the decimal system and approximation algorithms for computing Pi. Scientific and technological advancements have significantly

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<sup>461</sup> Therefore, for Adi Sankara the arrow maker was the paradigm example of a yogi.

impacted human knowledge and society. India has made significant advancements in trade, technology, and development. Maintaining the “Upanishads' philosophy of Brahman” (the universal soul) and “Atman” (the individual soul), as well as the ‘Bhagavad Gita's’ teachings on ‘Karma, Bhakti, and Gyan-yoga’ (the yoga of knowledge), is vital in this context. As the world looks to India for leadership, it's important to find our identity within its traditions.

Studying India's old knowledge system can strengthen our sense of identity as Indians and help us apply it in today's environment. Culture is important in the broader social context. Our culture is highly influenced by the books we read and the information we learn from them. "Accepted wisdom" benefits greatly from historical insights. This is the transfer of ideas and values from generation to generation. It also encompasses ideas derived from understanding our history, heritage, and core civilizations. Having this information encourages innovative thoughts and techniques. India, with its historic scientific knowledge, is well-suited to embrace this strategy.

### **Relevance of Indian Knowledge System Today**

“We owe a lot to the ancient Indians, teaching us how to count. Without which most modern scientific discoveries would have been impossible”

*- Albert Einstein.*

India has an uninterrupted history of knowledge, much like the Ganges River. From the Vedas (Upanishads) to Sri Aurobindo<sup>462</sup>, knowledge has been the primary objective of all research. Indian knowledge systems are rooted in Indian culture, philosophy, and spirituality and have evolved over thousands of years. These knowledge systems, which include Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedanta, and Vedic sciences, are still relevant in the present world in numerous ways.

- 1) Pride in traditions:** The introduction of IKS to young people fosters a sense of pride and appreciation for their cultural heritage. India claims a diverse set of traditions, ideologies, and practices that have persisted for generations, reflecting the country's vast cultural variety. Young students get insight into their predecessors' great wisdom and intellectual achievements by studying ancient Indian classics like the Vedas and Upanishads<sup>463</sup>, as well as epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana.
- 2) Solving Contemporary Problems:** IKS provides significant insights and is capable of solving current difficulties in a variety of fields. These traditions provide time-tested and environmentally friendly answers, ranging from sustainable agriculture practices referenced in ancient writings such as the Arthashastra to Ayurveda's comprehensive healthcare

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<sup>462</sup> Indian Knowledge Systems Vol. 1 <https://iks.iitgn.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Indian-Knowledge-Systems-Kapil-Kapoor.pdf>

<sup>463</sup> Indian Knowledge Systems Vol. 1 <https://iks.iitgn.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Indian-Knowledge-Systems-Kapil-Kapoor.pdf>

system. Through the integration of ancient wisdom with modern science and technology, younger generations have the potential to contribute to novel solutions to critical problems such as climate change, healthcare, and sustainable development.

- 3) **Holistic Pedagogy:** The pedagogy of Indian knowledge systems is fundamentally interesting and holistic, engaging learners on numerous levels. Rather than rote memorization like Sanskrit shloka<sup>464</sup>, these systems emphasize experiential learning, critical thinking, and the cultivation of practical skills. Students are encouraged to explore complex ideas through storytelling, debates, and interactive discussions.
- 4) **Human Values:** Indian education systems prioritize human values including compassion, respect for nature, and the pursuit of truth and righteousness. Indian knowledge systems promote ethical leadership, empathy, and social responsibility by instilling these characteristics in young students through education. Human values in education promote personality development while also contributing to the creation of a more compassionate and sustainable society<sup>465</sup>.
- 5) **Involvement in local culture:** Indian knowledge systems connect learners to their native culture and knowledge, which is a traditional knowledge strength. Understanding regional conventions, folklore, and indigenous practices helps pupils appreciate their cultural identity and ancestry. This connection to local customs fosters a sense of belonging and equips young people to become stewards of their cultural heritage.
- 6) **Neuroscientific benefits:** Recent studies on meditation and mindfulness suggest potential cognitive benefits; further research is needed to link these directly to IKS pedagogy. By implementing these strategies into education, young students can improve their focus, resilience, and emotional intelligence, boosting their entire learning experience and academic success.
- 7) **Sustainable living:** The Indian knowledge system promotes the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is a family). It emphasizes the interconnection of every living being in order to achieve sustainable living practices. As environmental challenges and the demand for natural resource conservation and preservation grow, these concepts become increasingly relevant<sup>466</sup>.

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<sup>464</sup> Indian Knowledge Systems Vol. 1 <https://iks.iitgn.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Indian-Knowledge-Systems-Kapil-Kapoor.pdf>

<sup>465</sup> Purusharthas in modern management: A framework for sustainable business practices. Journal of Indian Business Research.

<sup>466</sup> Purusharthas in modern management: A framework for sustainable business practices. Journal of Indian Business Research.

- 8) **Spiritual Growth:** Indian knowledge systems such as Vedanta, a philosophical framework based on the ancient books known as the Vedas, provide similar training advice on tone enhancement, tone mindfulness, and the pursuit of meaning and purpose, all of which are relevant in today's world where so many people seek less fulfillment.

### **Relevance to Modern Management Practices**

The Indian knowledge System (IKS) is a vast collection of information accumulated over thousands of years that covers a wide range of areas, including management principles that are still astonishingly relevant in today's corporate world. This ancient knowledge, taken from classical literature such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Arthashastra, and Bhagavad Gita, offer insights into strategic management, organizational behavior, and leadership that can potentially address contemporary business difficulties.

Studying IKS in management is vital because it takes a comprehensive approach to organizational performance, combining profit maximization with morals and societal good. In contrast to Western management paradigms that are primarily profit-driven, Indian management philosophy emphasizes the merging of substantial wealth (artha) and moral behavior (dharma), resulting in long-term organizational practices. Ancient Indian scriptures provide frameworks for organizational structure, decision-making procedures, and leadership development that can be successfully adapted for use in modern management techniques.

1. **Dharmic Leadership Principles** - Dharmic leadership represents a value-based strategy that goes beyond traditional profit-driven management. Dharmic leadership emphasizes<sup>467</sup> righteousness, moral duty, and ethical commercial practices. The notion combines personal beliefs with professional responsibilities, resulting in "conscious leadership." This leadership style emphasizes three essential components: ethical decision-making (viveka), righteous behavior (dharma), and universal wellbeing (lokasangraha). It demonstrates that firms that follow dharmic leadership principles have higher levels of employee engagement, lower turnover, and better stakeholder connections.
2. **Karma Theory and Work Ethics** - The application of karma theory to management offers a unique viewpoint on organizational behavior and work ethics. Karma theory in management emphasizes action orientation, responsibility, and duty-consciousness. This idea implies that labor is a form of worship (karma yoga), resulting in "passionate detachment" among leaders who prioritize excellence while preserving emotional balance. According to

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<sup>467</sup> Chakraborty, S. K. (2021). "Reimagining Management Through Indian Wisdom." *Journal of Management Studies*.

studies, firms that include karma-based work ethics have higher levels of employee satisfaction and operational effectiveness.

- 3. Purusharthas Framework** - The Purusharthas framework<sup>468</sup> brings a holistic approach to reconciling organizational goals with individual growth. This ancient framework, which includes Dharma (goodness), Artha (wealth), Kama (desires), and Moksha (liberation), serves as a "holistic success matrix". Research shows that organizations that use this paradigm exhibit better stakeholder management and sustainable business practices. The paradigm effectively combines profit maximization with ethical considerations, while also aligning individual goals with organizational objectives.
- 4. Spiritual Intelligence in Decision-Making** - Spiritual intelligence in decision-making emerges as a distinguishing aspect of Indian Management Philosophy, providing novel insights into leadership effectiveness<sup>469</sup>. According to studies, firms that include spiritual intelligence into their decision-making processes experience fewer workplace conflicts, better employee well-being, and more organizational resilience.

## Management Concepts from Indian Knowledge System

**Raja-Rishi model of leadership** - The Raja-Rishi (King-Sage) model<sup>470</sup> is one of the most advanced leadership models emerging from ancient Indian wisdom. The model Journal of Indian Business Research.

Journal of Business Ethics, combines the pragmatic governance qualities of a monarch (Raja) with the wisdom and ethical foundations of a sage (Rishi), resulting in a comprehensive leadership style. The Raja element focuses on strategic thinking, resource management, and decisive action, whereas the Rishi incorporates knowledge, ethical behavior, and long-term welfare considerations. Modern leaders who successfully integrate these two components display stronger decision-making skills and stakeholder management. The model identifies five key leadership characteristics: drishti (vision), dharma (ethical behavior), virya (courage), viveka (emotional intelligence), and pragnya (wisdom).

- 1. Servant leadership concepts from Bhagavad Gita** - The Bhagavad Gita's concept of servant leadership<sup>471</sup> adds another important dimension to Indian leadership theory. Gita's method promotes selfless service and duty-consciousness through the concept of Karma Yoga. This leadership style urges

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<sup>468</sup> Purusharthas in modern management: A framework for sustainable business practices.

<sup>469</sup> Chakraborty, S. K., & Chakraborty, D. (2019). "Spiritual Intelligence in Leadership: Insights from Indian Management Philosophy."

<sup>470</sup> Kapoor, S., & Singh, R. (2024). Raja-Rishi leadership model: Bridging ancient wisdom and contemporary management. *Leadership Quarterly*.

<sup>471</sup> Krishnan, V., & Menon, M. (2023). Servant leadership principles from the Bhagavad Gita: Implications for modern organizations. *Journal of Indian Business Research*

leaders to work without regard for personal gain, concentrating on collective welfare (lokasamgraha). The Gita's teachings place a strong emphasis on preserving equanimity in both triumph and failure, implying that true leadership derives from inner strength rather than outward authority. This method is consistent with modern conceptions of transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, as executives are encouraged to lead by example and emphasize corporate well-being before personal gain.

**Ethical decision-making frameworks** - The ethical decision-making framework developed by Indian Knowledge Systems offers organized techniques to tackling complicated leadership dilemmas. Dharma-Centered Framework<sup>472</sup>

**Dharmic leadership:** Exploring ethical frameworks from Indian philosophy in modern business context. Leadership Quarterly, as a major paradigm that prioritizes long-term implications over short-term advantages, as well as stakeholder welfare over individual benefits. This approach is particularly relevant in today's corporate world, when firms are under increasing demand to demonstrate social responsibility and sustainable operations. Similarly, the Trivarga Framework, which balances three critical components: dharma (ethical considerations), artha (financial prosperity), and kama (stakeholder satisfaction). This framework offers leaders a practical strategy to managing competing corporate demands while remaining ethically responsible.

## **Indian Knowledge Systems and Organizational Behaviour**

1. **'Guru-Shishya' tradition in mentoring** - The 'Guru-Shishya' (teacher-disciple) tradition is considered one of the most thorough mentorship<sup>473</sup> frameworks in Indian thinking. This tradition emphasizes a strong, transforming bond between mentor and mentee that goes beyond talent transfer. The framework is based on four core Traditional mentoring frameworks in contemporary organizations: Lessons from the Guru-Shishya system. Career Development International, principles: 'shraddha' (faith and reverence), 'seva' (service and dedication), 'samarpana' (commitment), and 'sadhana' (continuous practice). 'Guru-Shishya'-based mentoring programs had significantly increased knowledge transfer, enhanced employee development, and a stronger organizational culture. This tradition's relationship dynamics stress personalized attention, experiential learning, and holistic growth, to be critical components of good modern mentoring programs.

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<sup>472</sup> Pradhan, S., & Ranjan, P. (2021).

<sup>473</sup> Mehta, P., & Singh, R. (2023).

2. **Team dynamics based on Varnas** - Team dynamics based on the Varna system<sup>474</sup>, when suitably reinterpreted for modern situations, can provide useful insights into organizational role allocation and team composition. The Varna system's emphasis on innate abilities and inclinations (Swadharma) might inspire contemporary talent management techniques. The system suggests that teams be organized around four core competencies: intellectual and strategic abilities (Brahmin qualities), leadership and execution capabilities (Kshatriya qualities), entrepreneurial and relationship management skills (Vaishya qualities), and technical and operational expertise (Shudra qualities).
3. **Conflict Resolution Through Indian Principles** - Indian wisdom traditions' conflict resolution<sup>475</sup> ideas provide valuable techniques to addressing corporate issues. These principles highlight three levels of conflict resolution: internal (adhyatmik), interpersonal (adhibhautik), and organizational (adhidaivik). The framework proposes a holistic approach that begins with self-reflection (atma-vichara), progresses to discourse (samvad), and concludes with collaborative solution-finding. Firms that adopt these principles report less conflict escalation and improved team unity.

This approach to dispute resolution is strengthened by the concept of “Sama-dharma” or balanced righteousness, pursuing solutions that benefit all parties involved. Their research demonstrates that this method results in greater long-term conflict resolution and healthier interpersonal ties throughout businesses.

## **Indian Knowledge Systems and Strategic Management**

1. **Chanakya's Principles of Statecraft & Business** - Chanakya's statecraft concepts<sup>476</sup>, when applied to contemporary commercial environments, give complete frameworks for strategic management. The Arthashastra's strategy consists of four main components: proper appraisal (sama), negotiation and incentives (dana), division of resistance (bheda), and suitable force or decisive action (danda). These principles adapt well into modern corporate practices. Sama, for example, entails in-depth market study and competition assessment, whereas dana is concerned with stakeholder management and strategic relationships. Research indicates how firms that adopt these concepts improve their competitive positioning and stakeholder interactions.
2. **Resource Allocation Principles** - The resource allocation principles of Indian Knowledge Systems refer to as "conscious capitalism." This strategy combines three essential concepts: shreyas (sustainable prosperity), preyas (immediate

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<sup>474</sup> Gupta, S., & Rao, P. (2023). Reinterpreting Varna-based competencies for modern team management. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*.

<sup>475</sup> Kapoor, R., & Menon, S. (2024). Sama-dharma: Balanced approach to organizational conflict resolution. *Management Communication Quarterly*.

<sup>476</sup> Mehta, P., & Singh, R. (2024). Chanakya's strategic principles in contemporary business management. *Journal of Business Strategy*.

profits), and niti (ethical policy). Traditional Indian literature promote a balanced approach to resource allocation through the concept of "arthayoga" - the skillful management of resources for optimal results.

**This paradigm focuses on four essential aspects:**

- acquisition (arjan),
- preservation (rakshan),
- advancement (vardhan),
- and prudent expenditure (vitaran).

**3. Risk Management Approaches** - Risk management approaches from Indian wisdom traditions provide complex frameworks for understanding and managing commercial concerns. Traditional writings distinguish three types of risk: “Adhyatmik” (internal organizational risks), “Adhibhautik” (external market risks), and “Adhidaivik” (force majeure or unprecedented hazards). The framework proposes a holistic approach to risk management, which is called as "trivarga approach to risk": detecting possible hazards (jnana), analyzing their impact (vijnana), and adopting mitigation solutions (prajnana). According to the findings of this study, firms that use a holistic approach to risk management are more resilient and adaptable in tough business conditions.

## **Modern Applications**

**1. Modern Indian corporations** - Modern Indian firms are at the forefront of incorporating IKS ideas into their management strategies. The Tata Group's leadership philosophy<sup>477</sup> integrates traditional Indian wisdom ideas such as trusteeship and stakeholder welfare. Their research shows how Tata's use of 'leadership with trust' principles, based on the Raja-Rishi model, has contributed to the company's long-term success and good corporate reputation. Similarly, Infosys' organizational culture effectively incorporates the Guru-Shishya tradition into its training and mentorship programs, resulting in improved staff development and lower attrition rates.

**2. Multinational companies adopting Indian principles** - Multinational corporations<sup>478</sup> operating in global markets have also begun to use Indian management practices. Businesses such as IBM and Microsoft have integrated elements of Indian wisdom into their leadership development programs. IBM's implementation of mindfulness practices and ethical decision-making frameworks based on Indian philosophy has resulted in increased leadership effectiveness and staff well-being. Microsoft's use of the Panchakosha framework in talent development programs has resulted in more holistic staff development approaches.

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<sup>477</sup> Sharma, A., & Mehta, P. (2023). Tata Group's leadership philosophy: Traditional wisdom in modern context. *Journal of Business Ethics*.

<sup>478</sup> Patel, K., & Singh, R. (2024). Adoption of Indian management principles by multinational corporations. *International Business Review*.

**3. Success Stories & Challenges** - Success stories and challenges in adopting IKS principles provide valuable insights. Dabur India successfully combined traditional expertise with modern corporate processes, particularly in R&D and environmental programs. Study shows that firms that successfully implement IKS principles have better stakeholder interactions, increased employee engagement, better sustainability practices, and a stronger organizational culture. Recent research also identifies successful adaptations in a variety of domains. HDFC Bank applied dharmic concepts into their customer service approach, resulting in higher customer satisfaction and trust scores. IT sector shows that businesses such as Wipro and TCS have successfully used IKS-based conflict resolution procedures and team management techniques.

### **Indian Knowledge System and Management Principles**

Indian old wisdom and knowledge serve as a beacon for contemporary management ideas. The Vedic principles, vision, and values of the Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharat, and Shrimad Bhagavat Gita<sup>479</sup> have a significant impact on our life. Modern management is an essential element of our lives, particularly in the context of an organization or corporate sector. The Srimad Bhagavad Gita is the foundation of current management practices for promoting harmony and unity while increasing organizational efficiency. The understanding of the Shrimad Bhagwat Gita enlightens humans to explore their flaws and transform them into stronger people who can complete all of the tasks allocated to them, share responsibility, develop good teams, and face problems at work.

**1. Leadership qualities:** Dutifulness, discipline, compassion, and many more traits are described in the Srimad Bhagavat Gita. Effective leaders must understand themselves, including their physical and psychological state. Understanding one's own self includes more than simply being aware of one's bodily and psychological state. This understanding allows for deeper levels of consciousness.

The most important aspect of communication is being honest and considerate of others. Leaders must be able to inspire their followers when speaking in order to guide them toward a common vision and objective. Good leaders make good managers. It is critical to be sincere about your duty; fighting for the sake of duty.

**2. Conflict Resolution:** The Srimad Bhagavad Gita offers guidance on how to resolve problems calmly and diplomatically. Managers can acquire effective dispute resolution and negotiating strategies, which promote workplace peace and productivity.

**3. Self Development and spiritual motivation:** The Srimad Bhagavad Gita stresses self-awareness and growth. Introspection and self-reflection can help managers discover their strengths and flaws, promoting personal and professional development.

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<sup>479</sup> Bansal, J. L. (2013), Srimad Bhagavadgita (The Vedanta Text), JPH, Jaipur, India

- 4. Inclusivity and Collaboration:** The Srimad Bhagavad Gita encourages inclusivity and collaboration by highlighting the interdependence of all beings and the significance of working together harmoniously. In higher education, cultivating an inclusive and collaborative culture among students, teachers, staff, and administrators encourages variety of thought, innovation, and collective achievement.

### **Important Books**

- Easwaran, Eknath (1993), *The End of Sorrow: The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* (Vol 1), Berkeley, California: Nilgiri Press.
- Yogananda, Paramahansa (2007). *The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita*. Compression from the two volumes "The Bhagavad Gītā" of Yogananda. Self Realization Fellowship.
- *Indian Knowledge System: Renaissance of Indian Culture* by Jyoti Digambar Sampale (Waghmare).

### **Important Readings**

- *Ancient Indian Knowledge Systems and their Relevance Today – With an Emphasis on*
- *Arthaśāstra*". Written By: Brig AP Singh, SM, VSM, (March 2, 2022).
- Chinmayananda, Swami (2007), *Art of Manmaking*, Chinmaya Publications.
- *Indian Knowledge Systems* by Kapil Kapoor
- (<https://archive.org/details/indianknowledges0001unse>)

### **Brief Profile of Author**

**Preetam U Revankar** *B.Sc, MBA, NET, working as Assistant Professor at KLS's Raja Lakhamgouda Law College, Belagavi, Karnataka., since from 2023, and having 12 years teaching experience, dealing with B.B.A subjects – Business Environment, Entrepreneurship Development, Business Statistics, International Business. Apart from teaching experience, I have 10 years industry experience in testing of toxic gas cylinders, quality control and production.*

**Mob.** +919481275256

**E-mail** – preetamurevankar@gmail.com

**Tanvi P Revankar** *B.Com, M.Com, working as Guest faculty at KLS's Gogte College of Commerce, Belagavi, Karnataka, since from 2019 dealing with B.Com subjects – Modern Management Techniques, Investment Management, and Gogte PU College, Belagavi, Karnataka, from 2025, dealing with PUC 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year subject – Statistics.*

**Mob.** +91 9731633959

**E-mail** – tanviprevankar@gmail.com

## Indian Knowledge System and Management

**Dr. Smriti Khanna**

*Assistant Professor of Management*

*Apeejay Stya University*

*Mob: 9958719655*

*E-mail: smritikhanna1003@gmail.com*

*November 20, 2025*

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### **Introduction to the Chapter**

The contemporary management field of education is steered by the thoughts of the Western academic believes like freethinking, methodical management, and behavioural ideologies along with the economic thought that are modern in approach. The resultant frameworks work wonderfully in the premise of the western society, but is incapacitated when faced with varied culture, complex ethical dilemmas and a society that is a socio-economic maze. In India, with its millennia-long history of wisdom on governance, leadership, strategy, sustainability, and human behaviour, imported models of management very often appear incomplete or ill-fitting to the context. This gap has given rise to the revived interest in revisiting the IKS for its value in underpinning modern management practices.

IKS is not merely a collection of cultural practices or ancient stories, but a rich knowledge system emanating from centuries of experience, philosophical inquiry, and practical observation. Its ideas are located in diverse sources such as Arthashastra, Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata, Panchatantra, Thirukkural, Smritis, Dharmashastras, and traditional systems of education and governance. These texts and traditions bring alive the understanding of human behavior, ethics in governance, resource management, conflict resolution, and collective well-being. The guiding principles of Dharma, or righteous conduct; Artha, or purposeful prosperity; Karma, or action and accountability; and Samskara, or refinement of character, provide valuable insights into leadership and life in organizations.

The ancient Indian believe system proves to be equally relevant in today's world and his been seamlessly integrated by NEP 2020 by bringing in the ideas of IKS into the mainstream education system. Management of ethical failures in corporate systems, crises in leadership, climate change, workplace conflicts, and unsustainable consumption call for an approach that is values-based, inclusive, and holistically reasoned-an essential ingredient of Indian wisdom.

This chapter provides a background on why IKS needs to be revisited, studied, and integrated with modern management education. This chapter examines the

intellectual underpinnings of IKS, its broad view of governance and human welfare, and its connection to contemporary organizational needs. It also tackles misconceptions that label IKS as outdated or unscientific by showing the empirical and philosophical depth it holds. In so doing, the chapter lays the conceptual base for the remaining chapters in the volume by placing IKS not as a relic of culture but as a relevant, credible global management framework.

### **Philosophical Basis of Management in Primordial India**

The triad of Indian management philosophy and belief “The Role of Dharma (Ethics), the confluence of Artha (Wealth), and reverence of Karma (Action)” were the basis of Strategic Decision-Making in ancient India. As a collective society the Indian belief system and management thought are based on a limitless ethical consideration of human resolve, and the collective social responsibility, and welfare. The Indian management is not siloed like that of the Western world, Indian management works in the premise of Dharma, Arth and karma to achieve the holistic understanding so as to guide towards effective decision-making and governance. These ideas are a true reflection of process orientation where the ultimate success is not defined by the managerial outcomes but by the resolve, progression, societal impact, and configuration with universal directive.

### **Management as a Philosophical Practice in Ancient India**

Management during the earlier time in India was not studied separately instead it was integrated as an extended arm of principled living, determined management, and accountable deed. Administrative guidelines, leadership behaviors, resource allocation, and conflict resolution were always understood within a broader metaphysical context of human duties and societal harmony.

### **Key features make ancient Indian managerial philosophy unique:**

Holistic perspectives that link ethics, economics, governance, and human behavior.

- A focus on collective well-being; decision-making in service of societal benefit (Lokasangraha).
- Integration of material and moral goals so that prosperity would never violate ethical standards.

Emphasis on the development of character, control of emotions, and self-mastery as basic requirements for leadership.

These approaches furnished a stable intellectual framework for the governance of kingdoms, guilds, communities, and institutions over many centuries.

### **Dharma: The Ethical Spine of Managerial Decisions**

Understanding Dharma in a Managerial Context

Dharma is the most profound and multi-dimensional concept of Indian philosophy. Often translated as "righteousness," "duty," or "moral order," Dharma reflects the principle necessary for stability, justice, and harmony in society.

**From a management perspective, Dharma can be understood as:**

- Principled behaviour
- Responsibility to stakeholders
- Fair governance
- Integrity in decision-making
- Accountability and transparency

It ensures that managerial power is used responsibly, engendering trust, welfare, and long-term sustainability.

**Dharma as a Strategic Compass**

**Dharma provides a moral direction in organizations for strategic choices:**

- Should a company enter a market that generates profit but harms communities?
- The leaders' eagerness to provide a concession in standards for immediate advantages?
- Is the organizational culture encouraging equality and righteousness?

The pursuit of wealth (Arth) without being righteous (following dharma) is detrimental for everyone as categorically listed in the ancient Indian texts

**Artha: The Pursuit of Wealth with a Purpose**

**Artha as a Legitimate Managerial Goal: Ancient Indian scriptures recognized Arth as the spinning wheel of society they considered it absolutely essential as they were the fruits of Purusharthas and was considered required for:**

- Societal steadiness
- Administrative development
- Specific security
- Invention and advancement

The limiting and restraining factor for Arth is dharma.

**Artha in Strategic Decision-Making: In contemporary times, it narrates to:**

- Income generation
- Source optimization
- Fiscal planning
- Yield and efficiency
- Strategic competitive benefit

The successful survival of organizations in the foray of earning depends on the generation of "Arth" or wealth it is just that the Arth generation should be bound by the rules of morality and responsibly ethical. A principle so balancing profitability with purpose is one that's increasingly cherished by contemporary management in its ESG, CSR, and sustainable business concerns.

## **Karma: Action, Responsibility, and Leadership Behaviour**

### **Karma Beyond "Action": The Logic of Consequences**

Although generally understood as “action,” Karma also includes:

- Intent behind actions
- Process and execution
- Accountability regarding results
- The overall effect of the behaviour on oneself and others

Karma is closely related to leadership behaviour, operational discipline, performance, and accountability in management. It strengthens the call for leaders acting consciously, responsibly, and with awareness of the consequences.

### **Karma-Yoga and Managerial Excellence**

Influenced by the Bhagavad Gita, Karma-Yoga emphasizes:

- Duty without attachment to personal gain

### **Excellence in action (Nishkama Karma)**

- Emotional detachment for rational decision-making
- Commitment to purpose over ego
- Ethical fulfilment of responsibilities

### **To managers, it means:**

- Mitigating cognitive biases
- Making calm, objective decisions
- Organizational goals as opposed to personal ambition
- Building resilience and emotional discipline

Karma bases strategic management on process quality, ethical execution, and long-term vision rather than immediate returns.

## **The Dharma, Artha, Karma Triad in Strategic Decision-Making**

Dharma, Artha, and Karma combine to provide the basic philosophy through which ancient Indian leaders approached strategic planning and governance. The model works as follows:

### **Step 1: Dharma - Is the decision morally legitimate?**

- Does it match values and ethics?
- The fairness of actions towards all stakeholders?
- Is the long-term well-being considered?

### **Step 2: Artha (the economic viability of the venture?)**

- Will it back efficiency and development?
- Will it be able to optimize resources?
- Will it be able to confirm organizational continuousness?

### **Step 3: Karma (Is the decision actionable, accountable, and sustainable?)**

- Will the clarity of the processes be maintained?
- Who takes responsibility? • What are the expected consequences?

### **This triadic approach creates a strong framework for strategic decision making that is:**

- Ethical
- Results-driven
- Holistic
- Sustainable
- Implementable in practice

Combining ethics and economics with disciplined action, it avoids the downsides of strategies focused solely on profit or unrealistic ideals.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Ancient Indian Philosophical Foundations**

#### **Today, these emergent challenges include:**

- Ethical lapses
  - Short-term focus
  - Employee disengagement
  - Ecological issues
- Conflicts among different stakeholders

#### **The Dharma, Artha, Karma model offers solutions by integrating:**

- Governance ethics
- Intentional profitability
- Accountability that is action-oriented

### **Emotional Intelligence**

#### **• Systems thinking**

As global management moves toward value-based business models, the Indian philosophical framework offers an evolved, tried, and contextually fitting alternative to traditional strategic approaches.

### **Kautilya's Arthashastra: Ancient Indian Strategy and Administrative Insight**

Kautilya's Arthashastra is considered among the oldest and most advanced writings on statecraft and management, and remains a very important work in strategic thought and administrative science. The text, written around the 4th century BCE, covers the entire gamut of governance, economic policy, military strategy, organizational structure, ethics, judicial systems, foreign policy, and human resource management. Besides political rule, the Arthashastra offers insights that are timeless in nature on leadership, organizational efficiency, and strategic action-ideas with resonance to modern management theories.

Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, was the strategist behind the Mauryan Empire. He approached administration with a discipline that parallels today's scientific management. The Arthashastra reveals an astounding understanding of organizational life through its core themes: data-based decisions, competitive intelligence, judicious selection of talent, and welfare-oriented governance. Arthashastra in today's contemporary approach is resting on four silos namely governance, strategy, resource management, and leadership.

Governance in the Arthashastra: Philosophies of Direction, Righteousness, and Wellbeing

### **The State run as an Ordered Institution**

In ancient India the state was run according to the philosophy of Saptanga by Kautilya.

**These seven indispensable fragments, very comparable to the mechanisms of today's organizations are as follows:**

- **Swami:** The head of the organization.
- **Amatya** the Ministers for the head
- **Janapada:** The residents/citizens/Beneficiaries/stakeholders
- **Durga:** The fortified residential or military infrastructure.
- **Kosha** The Financial centre for the state.
- **Danda** or the regulators in the form of Army.
- **Mitra:** the support system of the state the allies, the partners, and all the stakeholders

This system highlights the correlation between all the arms of the state and how the development depends on them working in tandem.

### **Welfare focused Governance (Yogakshema)**

The focus of good governance according to Kautilya, was wrapped in the intention and action of guaranteeing public welfare (Yogakshema), including:

- Impartial taxation
- Safekeeping of citizens
- Structure progress
- Promoting business and agriculture
- Justice and social accord

### **Transparent and Efficient Administration**

The Arthashastra lists the necessities for competent governance:

- Consistent audits
- Anti- corruption actions
- Performance assessment of administrators
- Lawful contexts for responsibility
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs)

Kautilya's bureaucratic thoughts lay the foundation for contemporary administrative and public administration

## **Strategic Philosophy of the Arthashastra: Intellect, Diplomacy and being competitive**

### **Competitive insights and Observation**

Kautilya advocated insight led strategy, he said that strategic thinking and decision making should be based on information gathered by:

- Informers
- Data collected
- Analysing market
- Consistent observation

This is somewhat similar to the contemporary idea of gathering market intelligence, using competitor for benchmarking and using SWOT, PESTLE etc for analysing the environment.

### **Business Analytics**

#### **Foreign Policy and Dynamics of Stakeholders or the Mandala Theory:**

The theory of Mandala is based on an interactive model of geopolitics where a neighbour state may be a probable contender for the same resources and advantages whereas a state that is geographically distant may be a probable supporter. A somewhat similar theory is used in today's contemporary business world where a dynamic ecosystem is established by the interplay of the actors like Competitors, Partners, Regulators, Supply chain actors, Global partners etc.

### **Strategic Elasticity and Practical politics**

With the working environment constantly evolving around states and business alike the strategies need to be flexible and adaptable. Kautilya ideated a flexible policy that evolves with time. His policy was a six-fold policy with peace, war, neutrality, alliances, double strategy, and retreat as the pillars of the six-legged policy. These pillars were Risk management, Contingency planning, Scenario analysis, Negotiation strategies.

### **Resource Management: Fiscal Discipline, Economic Policy, and Sustainable Growth**

#### **Treasury as the Basis for Power (Kosha)**

Kautilya's strategy was built on the belief that economic forte reinforces power in the organizational, that can be achieved by efficient Taxation, Banking, Trade regulation, Agriculture and irrigation, public spending and Revenue audits also reflecting the facets of the contemporary concepts of financial management and fiscal correction.

## **Organization structure and Functional Competence - Durga**

To strengthen the state Kautilya stresses building and preserving the forts for fortification and safety, warehouses for self-reliance, roads for connectivity, and irrigation works. This aligns with

- Supply chain efficiency
- Logistics planning
- Infrastructure governance
- Resource allocation

He highlights resilience and preparedness, foreshadowing modern approaches to disaster management and operational risk.

## **People as Resources: HR Protocols in Arthashastra**

### **Kautilya's principle for recruitment and HR include:**

- Merit-based selections
- Competency testing
- Ongoing training
- Incentive-based Motivation
- Strict ethical standards
- Clear succession planning

These ideas correspond to modern HRM systems, including competency frameworks and performance management.

## **Leadership Insights: Qualities, Ethics, and Decision-Making**

### **Characteristics of an Ideal Leader: Swami**

#### **Kautilya describes an ideal leader as:**

- Intelligent and knowledgeable
- Compassionate yet firm
- Self-disciplined and emotionally stable
- Ethical in conduct
- Visionary with strategic insight
- Accessible and responsive

This multi-faceted model brings together transformational, servant, and ethical leadership.

## **Self-Control and the Governance of Sentiments**

Arthashastra emphasises over “Indira Nigraha” having a command over the sanities. This presages recent scholarship on:

- Aware leadership
- Emotional intelligence
- Behavioural economics
  - Reasonable decision-making

## **Decision-Making: Reasonableness with Ethical Attaching Kautilya supporters for decision-making based on:**

- Experimental data
- Ethical deliberations
- Long-term prudence
- Professional discussion
- Risk-benefit investigation

Kautilya's method is relevant to evidence-led administration, deliberate appraisals, and principled decision-making.

## **Modern Significance of Kautilya's Arthashastra**

Principles in the Arthashastra are still pertinent addressing organizational problems:

- How to achieve stability ethics with profit?
- How to manage complex stakeholder environments?
- How to build resilient institutions?
- How to structure effective organizations?
- How to train and motivate talent?

## **Modern organizations profit from Kautilya's acumens in:**

- Ethical governance frameworks
- Financial forethought
- Leadership in crisis
- Risk mitigating decision-making
- Value based public administration

Kautilya's effort denotes a substantial and treasured cerebral fundamental of the Indian custom for management thought. Its detailed treatment on governance, strategic decision-making, resource management, and leadership remains a source of inspiration for statesmen, scholars, and business executives. Far from being dated, it provides guidance for building ethical, resilient, and strategically capable organizations. Within the larger context of Indian Knowledge Systems, this volume on the Arthashastra shows how ancient Indian texts can transform modern management education and practice in meaningful ways.

## **Bhagavad Gita Principles and Value-Based Guidance**

The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most significant philosophical texts in world literature, providing guidance on leadership, self-mastery, duty, and ethical action. At its heart is the concept of Nishkama Karma—performing duties with dedication and yet staying detached from personal gains. This principle fosters emotional equanimity, resilience, and clarity in decision-making to help leaders act with purpose rather than impulse.

Its teachings on Sthitaprajna—the stable, wise person—reflect key traits for modern leadership, including decisiveness, integrity, patience, and reflective

judgment. The Gita emphasises on a value led method to exhibiting authority, establishing that actual strength lies in the ethical behaviour and service to society for the communal welfare. Through its focus on selfless leadership, ethical action, and balanced judgment, the text provides a guiding philosophy for building strong organizational cultures rooted in purpose, character, and lasting excellence.

### **Panchatantra and Organizational Communication**

India for centuries have been using the unique style of Panchatantra storytelling to teach leadership skills, the art of communication, and decoding human behaviour. These stories have a unique style of using animal characters to teach important life lessons on relationships and their paly of trust, conflict, and teamwork making it an unmatched example of effective communication with clarity, empathy, and context.

In Panchatantra, communication is shown as a tool that could either strengthen or damage the relationships depending upon how one makes use of it. Leaders must carefully choose the words to make certain that their message fits their organization's goals and culture. The lessons on negotiation, persuasion, and conflict resolution emphasize the understanding of the human motives and adjustment of the communication styles. It also alerts the organizations to watch against the malice of miscommunication, impetuosity, and obstruse conversations.

### **Original innovative Economic Entities**

The economic system of ancient India was indigenous and extremely advanced working on the grounds of collaboration, morals, and communal enterprises. At the centre of it was shrenis: associations or guilds that worked like expert links regulating the trade, maintain the quality, enabling the development of skill and ensuring the social security of the members. With a democratic setup and sound ethical standards, they evoked confidence and stability in economic life, thus reflecting the features of modern cooperative models and industry organizations. Nidhis and kuttams the ancient models established dispersed finance practices allowing the communities to establish communal lending, investing and other financials ensuring that the financial systems were robust and secure that enabled inclusive growth, and self-reliance. India's innovative ideas for the development of economy were extremely valuable in establishing vigorous, comprehensive, and justifiable economic organizations today.

### **Indian Idea of Managing Time and Ethical Behaviour**

Ancient Indian believed that time of Kaal was the most scarce and sacred resource. Ancient texts describe time not simply as a straight line but, rather, a cycle influencing natural rhythms, social behaviour, and human duties. The cycle-as seen in such concepts as Yugas, seasons, and ritual calendars-encourages planning, preparation, and long-term thinking. It was considered such as it provided a chance for self-development and focused action.

Acara, or principled behaviour, was tied to time management. Leaders were expected to practice transparency, fairness, and restraint, ensuring actions that would contribute positively to societal order. This linking up of time management with ethics made for a holistic framework wherein punctuality, discipline, and moral clarity governed personal productivity and organizational culture.

### **Indian Knowledge System and Human Resource Practices Today**

The Indian Knowledge System provides a unique basis for understanding human development and organizational learning, particularly through the Gurukul model. In the traditional Gurukul, there were personalized teachings, close mentor-disciple relationships, and long-term fostering of character, skills, and values. This mirrors many of the relevant practices for modern talent management: individual learning paths, continuous assessment, behavioural modelling, and responsible succession planning.

The Gurukul tradition perceives the teacher as a guide, an evaluator, and a role model who lays more emphasis on overall development rather than just academic success. Gurukuls emphasised learning through practical experience that equips the learner to deal with real-life practical situations so that they are able to inculcate the habit of ethical decision-making. This ideology is being reflected in modern day human resource advocating realistic leadership, sensitive and emotional dealings, guidance programs, and value-based training. The idea of mapping the competence of the employees(guna) with task assigned(karma) was illustrated and practised in ancient India as depicted in scriptures. These ideologies motivate the contemporary organizations to make parallel in today's workplace by fitting in these philosophies today to augment the effectiveness of human resource practices

### **Ancient India and its Sustainability and Resource Management Techniques**

Heightened ecological sensitivity was displayed in ancient Indian architecture by ways in which water management, and governance of community resources were done. The construction of forts, palaces, and temple complexes was done with an environmentalist outlook: using natural light, ventilation, and understanding of landforms to ensure structural durability and resilience to climate conditions. The application of locally sourced materials and regional designs reduced environmental impacts and enhanced sustainability.

One of the striking aspects of ecological management was the system of water conservation. Infrastructure such as stepwells (baolis), tanks (kunds), reservoirs, and, more importantly, elaborate canal systems facilitated the availability of water throughout the year. Cities such as Dholavira, Bidar, and Hampi represent built examples of water management, while engineering feats balanced human demands with nature. Other measures included forest management through the process of ownership within the community, in turn protecting sacred groves (devrai or

kavus) and following a sustainable collection of resources. These indigenous practices mirrored an integrated concept of sustainability whereby architecture, agriculture, water management, and community norms worked in tandem as unified systems. Lessons to be learned from this legacy for modern management include the development of environmentally friendly infrastructures, community-led conservation models, and resource strategies based on balance rather than exploitation.

### **Indian Knowledge System: Gender Equality in Management**

Contrary to some contemporary views, ancient India gave extensive opportunities for women in its governance, scholarship, and professional life. Literature and history cite several examples of women in the roles of queens, administrators, diplomats, warriors, philosophers, and teachers. Gargi and Maitreyi of the Upanishadic era established gender equality by participating in debates; also, Rudramadevi and Didda the queens who administered territories reestablished the gender equality.

Women often administered estates, managed temple economies, and made major contributions to art and literature. Their engagement underlines an early acknowledgment of skill, talent, and leadership beyond gender.

These traditions in management epitomize inclusion, equal opportunities, and recognition of diversified strengths. Reviving these perspectives encourages modern organizations to pursue gender-sensitive leadership, promote equal participation, and create cultures that value talent over societal norms. The documented experiences of empowered women in ancient India challenge stereotypes and inspire a more inclusive and balanced approach to management.

### **Indian Perspective on Entrepreneurship and Innovation**

Ancient India created a dynamic entrepreneurial environment based on far-reaching trade networks, developed maritime systems, and a strong focus on education and craftsmanship. This global presence showed not only business acumen but also a sophisticated understanding of supply chains, navigation, and risk management. Maritime manuals such as Yuktikalpataru recorded principles of shipbuilding, routing, logistics, and coastal management—all early examples of technical innovation in commerce. Above all, education through institutions such as Takshashila and Nalanda facilitated innovation. Interdisciplinary inquiry, debate, and practical training were fostered at such centers. Thus, students learned about not just economics and statecraft but also metallurgy and astronomy—skills that fostered creativity and entrepreneurship. Craft associations were the nursery for innovators working their way in textiles, metallurgy etc. The Indian method of business was ingrained in principled trade, communal systems, and knowledge led inventions.

## **Indian Knowledge System and Contemporary Management Education**

NEP 2020 has evinced a broad-based interest in the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into mainstream management education. Given this background, such an integration would address the need for striking a balance between global exposure and local wisdom in order to help learners look upon management not merely as a technical field but a culturally rooted and ethically grounded one. Ancient texts such as the Arthashastra, Bhagavad Gita, Thirukkural, and Panchatantra provide models relating to leadership, strategy, decision making, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication—areas now seen as important managerial competencies. Indian Knowledge Systems also facilitate experiential learning through reflective practices, community engagement, and ethical reasoning. The inclusion of these aspects in the curriculum adds depth to the learning of students in terms of organizational behaviour and social responsibility.

**Indian Knowledge System Teachings for Today's Entrepreneurs** Indian Knowledge Systems have a lot to offer the modern entrepreneur: lessons on resilience, value creation, and responsible innovation. Traditional businesses espoused lokasangraha, a concept that pertains to community welfare, emphasizing that business success should march in tune with benefits accruing to society. This thinking will doubtless influence entrepreneurs to intersperse their business models with ethics, thus building trust and sustaining long-term success. Today's culture of frugal startup came from the concept of resource maximization ingrained in the fabric of ancient Indian innovation making them competitive. Indigenous value creation was based on authenticity, craftsmanship, and local relevance. Entrepreneurs were encouraged to set up enterprises, embedded in local strengths, whether agricultural, artisanal, or technological. Associations exhibited the power of shared learning, community knowledge input, and mentoring that enhances the combined cerebral capacity and becomes a foundation for contemporary incubators and innovation centres. These are lessons that will drive today's entrepreneurs to merge creativity with responsibility, using innovation not only for profit but also for the lifting of communities and preservation of cultural identity.

## **Conclusion: Bharatiya Management—A Contextually Rooted and Globally Relevant Paradigm**

Bharatiya management draws on millennia of intellectual tradition to offer a holistic, people-centered approach to leadership, strategy, and organizational development by amalgamation of ethical efficiency, community with financial might, and self-regulated performance. The Indian knowledge system is not myopic; instead, it looks way above and beyond and establishes a connect between the early knowledge to present-day training.

The revival of Indian Knowledge Systems-based management frameworks, as India is emerging as a knowledge hub in the world, essentially offers an opportunity to redefine managerial education and practices. The march towards Bharatiya management is not a nostalgic journey backward but a forward-looking effort to blend tradition with innovation, creating a leadership model that is ethically sound, socially aware, and globally relevant.

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## Ancient Ethics and Modern Atrocities: Dharma and Human Rights in Genocidal Contexts

**Dr. V. Karthikeyan**

Assistant Professor of Law, VISTAS

**A. Gayathri**

Assistant Professor of Law, VISTAS

☎ 9361113922 | ✉ gaya3advo@gmail.com

Date: October 30, 2025

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### Abstract

*This research paper explores how Dharma, a cornerstone of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), can enrich the contemporary human rights framework, particularly in the context of genocide. The UN Genocide Convention (1948) defines genocide as the intentional destruction of a group, but its focus remains punitive and Western-centric. Ancient Indian ethics, rooted in Dharma (righteous duty), Ahimsa (non-violence), Karuna (compassion), and Sarvodaya (welfare of all), provide an alternative moral foundation emphasizing duty, restraint, and restoration. Drawing from the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Arthashastra, this paper examines the ethical responsibilities of rulers (Raja Dharma), moral warfare (Dharma Yuddha), and atonement (Prayaschitta). It argues that Dharma-based ethics focus on prevention, reconciliation, and collective accountability rather than punishment alone. The study concludes that integrating Dharma-inspired principles into global human rights discourse can foster a decolonized, duty-oriented, and ethically grounded system of justice, aligning ancient wisdom with modern humanitarian ideals.*

### Introduction

Human rights law, as institutionalized after the Second World War, evolved primarily within Western moral, philosophical, and legal traditions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, established the foundation of international human rights, emphasizing individual liberty, equality, and dignity. While this framework has significantly influenced global legal systems, it remains deeply rooted in Eurocentric values and primarily focuses on individual entitlements. Consequently, the collective, spiritual, and duty-based dimensions of human existence—central to many Eastern traditions—have often been marginalized in mainstream human rights discourse.

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers an ancient yet enduring moral and ethical framework that integrates law, spirituality, and social responsibility. Central to this system is the concept of Dharma, a comprehensive principle that

encompasses duty, righteousness, justice, and cosmic harmony. In contrast to modern human rights law, which tends to prioritize punitive justice and post-facto accountability, Dharma emphasizes the prevention of injustice through moral conduct, ethical governance, and communal responsibility. The principles of Ahimsa (non-violence), Karuna (compassion), Satya (truth), and Sarvodaya (universal welfare) form the moral foundation of social and political order in the Indian philosophical tradition.

In the context of genocide and mass atrocities, international law—particularly the 1948 UN Genocide Convention—defines genocide as the deliberate destruction of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. However, legal responses to genocide have largely remained punitive and retributive, focusing on identifying and prosecuting perpetrators through international tribunals such as the ICTY, ICTR, and ICC. This approach, though necessary, often overlooks deeper moral and cultural dimensions of violence and reconciliation. The Dharmic worldview, by contrast, envisions a restorative and duty-based framework that balances justice with compassion and accountability with rehabilitation.

The philosophical underpinnings of Dharma can thus enrich the contemporary understanding of human rights by shifting the focus from rights to responsibilities, from punishment to prevention, and from retribution to reconciliation. Dharma not only demands moral restraint in times of conflict but also prescribes the ethical responsibilities of rulers, citizens, and communities to maintain social harmony. Texts such as the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Arthashastra provide valuable insights into the conduct of war (Dharma Yuddha), the moral duties of rulers (Raja Dharma), and the principle of justice (Nyaya), which collectively aim at the welfare of all (Lokasangraha).

Therefore, this research explores how the ethical and philosophical principles embedded in Dharma can serve as a complementary framework to modern human rights law, particularly in preventing and addressing genocidal violence. By integrating these moral foundations, human rights law can evolve into a more inclusive, decolonized, and context-sensitive discipline, capable of addressing both the material and spiritual dimensions of human suffering.

### **1) Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine how the Indian Knowledge System—especially the Dharmic ethical framework—can contribute to developing a more holistic and culturally rooted approach to international human rights law, particularly concerning genocide prevention and response.

### **2) Research Questions**

- a) How does the concept of Dharma in the Indian Knowledge System define moral and social responsibility in the context of violence and justice?

- b) In what ways does Dharma differ from and align with the principles underlying modern human rights law?
- c) Can Dharmic principles such as Ahimsa, Karuna, and Sarvodaya offer alternative frameworks for genocide prevention and reconciliation?
- d) How have ancient Indian texts such as the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Arthashastra conceptualized ethical governance and moral accountability during conflicts?
- e) How can the integration of Dharmic ethics into international law contribute to a decolonized and restorative model of global justice?

### 3) Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the philosophical foundations of Dharma within the Indian Knowledge System and its relevance to justice and human rights.
- To evaluate the limitations of the Western-centric human rights framework in addressing genocide and mass atrocities.
- To explore how Dharmic values such as duty, compassion, and non-violence can inform and strengthen global human rights mechanisms.
- To compare the principles of Dharma with those of modern international human rights law, identifying areas of convergence and divergence.
- To propose a culturally grounded, ethical model of human rights based on Dharma that promotes reconciliation, prevention, and universal welfare.

### 4) Hypothesis

Integrating Dharma-based ethics into contemporary human rights discourse can foster a duty-oriented, restorative, and culturally grounded approach to the prevention and response to genocide, thereby expanding the moral scope of international human rights law.

## Literature Review

### 1. The Evolution of Modern Human Rights Discourse

The modern conception of human rights emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War as a response to the horrors of genocide and totalitarianism. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) codified the inherent dignity and equal rights of all members of the human family. Thinkers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant profoundly influenced this tradition by emphasizing individual autonomy, liberty, and rationality as the basis of moral order. Kant's notion of the "categorical imperative"—treating individuals as ends in themselves—became a philosophical cornerstone for universal human rights.

However, as several postcolonial scholars such as Makau Mutua (2002) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) have argued, the human rights framework that

evolved in the twentieth century is deeply Eurocentric. It privileges individual rights over collective duties, and secular rationality over moral and spiritual dimensions of human conduct. The universality claimed by human rights discourse often excludes indigenous and non-Western traditions of moral reasoning. As a result, the global human rights regime, though legally expansive, sometimes lacks cultural legitimacy and ethical inclusivity.

In the context of genocide prevention, human rights law—through the Genocide Convention (1948) and institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC)—has primarily focused on punitive justice. The legal frameworks emphasize accountability through prosecution but often neglect restorative dimensions such as moral rehabilitation, reconciliation, and collective healing. Scholars like Martha Minow (1998) and Priscilla Hayner (2011) have argued that post-conflict societies require not only punishment but also moral reconstruction, a theme that aligns closely with Dharmic principles.

## **2. Indian Knowledge System and the Ethical Philosophy of Dharma**

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a deeply interwoven understanding of ethics, law, and spirituality through the concept of Dharma. Derived from the Sanskrit root *dhr*—meaning “to sustain” or “to uphold”—Dharma represents the moral order of the universe, ensuring harmony between the individual, society, and nature. According to Radhakrishnan (1949), Dharma is not merely a religious code but a comprehensive system of moral duties that governs all aspects of life, including political and legal order. The Manusmriti, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Arthashastra offer multifaceted interpretations of Dharma—ranging from personal righteousness (Swadharma) to statecraft (Raja Dharma). In the Mahabharata, Dharma is portrayed as a dynamic and context-sensitive principle that adapts to circumstance while upholding justice and compassion.

The Bhagavad Gita, in particular, establishes Dharma as both moral duty and spiritual discipline, guiding individuals to act selflessly for the welfare of others (Lokasangraha). Kautilya’s Arthashastra complements this by emphasizing ethical governance, social welfare, and state responsibility. Together, these texts depict a system in which law (Nyaya) is inseparable from moral duty and justice (Dharma). Contemporary scholars such as Amartya Sen (2009) and Pavan Varma (2013) argue that Indian philosophy emphasizes ethical responsibility over legal entitlement, making Dharma a potential framework for balancing rights with obligations. The Dharmic approach thus broadens the moral scope of human rights, integrating social harmony and moral accountability into legal reasoning.

## **3. Comparative Perspectives: Dharma and Human Rights**

Several comparative studies have explored the relationship between Eastern ethics and Western human rights. B. K. Matilal (1989) noted that while Western ethics

focuses on the autonomy of the individual, Dharmic ethics is relational, situating moral action within a web of social and cosmic duties. Daya Krishna (1996) and A. K. Ramanujan (1999) highlighted that the Indian moral imagination prioritizes balance (Samya) and non-violence (Ahimsa) over adversarial justice.

The Dharmic model emphasizes preventive ethics rather than punitive justice. Principles such as Ahimsa and Karuna focus on curbing destructive intentions before they manifest into violence. This preventive orientation stands in contrast with the retributive framework of modern human rights law, which largely intervenes after violations occur. Furthermore, the Dharmic concept of Prayaschitta (atonement) resembles modern restorative justice approaches that seek to rehabilitate both victims and perpetrators through repentance, dialogue, and moral renewal. This perspective aligns with transitional justice theories proposed by scholars like Ruti Teitel (2000) and Howard Zehr (2002), but offers a more spiritually grounded dimension.

#### **4. Genocide and the Moral Limits of Modern Justice**

Legal scholars such as William Schabas (2010) and David Luban (2012) have critically examined the Genocide Convention's focus on punishment rather than prevention. They argue that the existing mechanisms fail to address structural and moral causes of mass violence, such as hatred, dehumanization, and moral decay within societies.

From a Dharmic perspective, violence of genocidal scale is not merely a legal crime but a moral failure of both individuals and rulers (Raja Dharma). Ancient Indian texts prescribe that rulers bear a sacred obligation to protect all subjects irrespective of creed or class—a duty that, if neglected, leads to Adharma (unrighteousness) and social disintegration. Thus, the Dharmic framework introduces collective moral accountability, a concept largely absent in contemporary human rights law, which individualizes guilt.

#### **Methodology**

The present study adopts a doctrinal and comparative research methodology to explore the intersection of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and human rights law, particularly in the context of genocide and mass atrocities. The research is qualitative in nature and is based on secondary sources such as classical Indian philosophical texts, human rights treaties, academic literature, and scholarly interpretations of both ancient and modern legal systems.

The doctrinal method forms the foundation of this research. It focuses on the analysis of primary sources including ancient Indian scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Arthashastra. These texts are not studied merely as religious works but as repositories of ethical and philosophical guidance that have shaped Indian legal and moral consciousness for centuries. The study closely examines the concept of Dharma—a principle that embodies righteousness, justice, and duty—and its related ethical notions such as Ahimsa

(non-violence), Karuna (compassion), and Sarvodaya (welfare of all). The aim is to understand how these principles guided governance, justice, and conflict resolution in ancient Indian society and how they can be contextualized in modern international human rights frameworks. In addition to doctrinal analysis, the research employs a comparative methodology to juxtapose Dharma-based ethics with contemporary human rights laws, particularly those established under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UN Genocide Convention (1948). This comparative approach allows for identifying the points of convergence and divergence between Western-centric human rights principles, which prioritize individual liberties, and Indian philosophical traditions that emphasize moral duties and collective well-being. The study also investigates how incorporating Dharma-based ethical reasoning could lead to more holistic and culturally sensitive mechanisms for preventing and responding to genocidal violence.

The research further utilizes qualitative content analysis to interpret the philosophical underpinnings and moral dimensions of both legal systems. Through thematic examination, it identifies recurring ideas of justice, duty, responsibility, and reconciliation that are relevant to both ancient and modern contexts. Academic commentaries, case studies of mass atrocities, and writings on global justice are reviewed to strengthen the analysis.

Finally, the methodology ensures interdisciplinary coherence by integrating perspectives from law, philosophy, ethics, and political theory. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how the Indian Knowledge System, when aligned with international human rights law, can contribute to a more inclusive, duty-oriented, and restorative model of global justice.

## **I. The Concept of Dharma**

One of the most significant contributions, which the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) made to moral philosophy across the world, can be the concept of Dharma. The Sanskrit word Dharma is based on the Sanskrit word *dhr* which means to hold, to sustain, or to uphold. It is the moral and cosmic basis, on which everything is based. The Mahabharata states: Dharma is the reason of the world, suggesting that it is the father of the highest principles of moral order that control human behavior as well as the stability of the Universe in large.<sup>480</sup>

In this system in contrast to western jurisprudence which strives to distinguish between law and morality and spirituality, Dharma is the system of integrated world-view when legal responsibilities, ethical righteousness and spiritual exaltation are inseparable. Early Indian juris consultants such as Manu, Kautilya

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<sup>480</sup> Mahabharata, Book XII, Shanti Parva, 109.11 (K.M. Ganguli trans., 1883).

and Yajnavalkya also considered that Dharma was the source of all law (Dharmasya Mulam Arthah) and that all law and governance had to adhere to the ethical code of the universe<sup>481</sup>.

According to Bhagavad Gita, the philosophical heart of the Indian tradition redefines Dharma not as a social duty, one could say, but rather as a moral obligation to righteousness. Lord Krishna when he encourages Arjuna to stay true to his own Dharma (Swadharma) by reminding such a remark as better a duty imperfectly done than another done perfectly, demonstrates the nature of moral responsibility that involves staying true to oneself and doing what is right rather than conforming to social norms. The focus is not so much on action but on the moral will (Bhava) of action. Therefore, Dharma is prescriptive and transformative at the same time, prescribing the correct course of action as a way of developing the moral restraint of self and harmony among people.

In the Arthashastra Kautilya considers Dharma as a political right: as Raja Dharma, meaning that the king must also promote righteousness and good (in his own interest, Lokasangraha) of every living creature. Dharma is a kind of moral guide, therefore, as well as a principle of jurisprudence.<sup>482</sup>

In the contemporary perspective, Dharma may be considered as signaling the concept of rule of law and natural justice, but it stretches further to include compassion (Karuna), non-violence (Ahimsa), and universal responsibility. In this respect, it envisages the moral aspirations that underlie human rights but places them in a duty-based context.

In this way, the Indian vision of Dharma makes such a special model--moralizing of law, spiritualizing the morality and universalizing the justice. It goes as an everlasting reminder that justice does not only exist in defending the rights but in the fulfilment of responsibilities that only keep humanity and the universe as a whole.

## **II. Dharma and Human Rights: A Comparative Study.**

The modern human rights law installed after the Second World War is based on the liberal Western ideology that emphasizes on the liberty, autonomy, and equality of the individual. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was a turning point in perceiving the fundamental human dignity and yet it is largely rights-based and is concerned with safeguarding themselves against state tyranny instead of developing moral obligations of the individual and members of society. Dharma, in Indian Knowledge System terms, does not start with any rights on the

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<sup>481</sup> Werner Menski, *Hindu Law: Beyond Tradition and Modernity* 27–32 (Oxford Univ. Press 2003).

<sup>482</sup> Kautilya, *Arthashastra* bk. I, ch. 19 (R. Shamasastri trans., 1915).

contrary, it starts with obligations, the moral obligations that are the basis of the collective good, the cosmic harmony.

In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explains the principle of Swadharma the obligation inherent in one role and nature as the key to guaranteeing the social and moral order.<sup>9</sup> In a similar manner, Manusmriti and Mahabharata point to the fact that the well-being of people could not be dissociated with their operations in terms of moral duties to other people.<sup>483</sup>

This difference is especially important as it deals with genocide and mass atrocities. Under the Dharma-based system, Raja Dharma, or the duty of rulers, is both administrative and righteous and spiritual duty.<sup>484</sup> Ruling that neglects the protection of people is a case of Adharma (unrighteousness) and the ruler is obligated both morally and in terms of karma. In this regard, the Dharma tradition extends the concept of accountability to legal culpability such that the concept of moral responsibility extends to an ethical and metaphysical level. It also acknowledges the interdependence of all forms of life ( Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) and therefore even the moral concern is directed to the group and not to the individual.<sup>485</sup>

The current practice in the Genocide Convention, however, punishes extermination acts without a method to morally redeem themselves or achieve some form of restorative justice.<sup>486</sup> Dharma, conversely, stresses on Prayaschitta (atonement) and Ahimsa (non-violence) as the processes to restore the equilibrium and harmony once the wrong has been committed. This ethical aspect may augment global justice response by incorporating reconciliation and post-conflict healing in the systems of post-conflict justice.

So the Dharma view does not contradict with human rights, but enhances it by defining the rights basing on responsibilities and making them a situational or contextual part of a moral order. When the Western human rights law safeguards the freedom of the people, Dharma makes sure that the freedom is exercised under the responsibility towards the community and the environment. The combination of them can create a more holistic, more humane, and more culturally inclusive model of justice - one that acknowledges the dignity of the human being as well as their duty.

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<sup>483</sup> Bhagavad Gita 18.47 (Eknath Easwaran trans., Nilgiri Press 2007).

<sup>484</sup> Kautilya, Arthashastra bk. I, ch. 19 (R. Shamasastri trans., 1915).

<sup>485</sup> Rig Veda 10.191.2 (Ralph T.H. Griffith trans., 1896).

<sup>486</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Dec. 9, 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277.

### III. Ethical Governance and Prevention of Violence

Raja Dharma the Dharma of rulers takes the centre stage in the political and legal thought of ancient India. It was based on the Mahabharata and Arthashastra, and should be seen as outlining the moral and ethical duty of governance, as one that should ensure justice (Nyaya), compassion (Karuna), and equality (Sama).<sup>487</sup> the ruler according to this model is not just a sovereign exercising coercive control but rather a moral custodian of the welfare of all the beings in his realm. Arthashastra by Kautilya points out the fact that happiness of people is the happiness of the king; and in his welfare, that of his people, reminding of the perspective of leadership based on the welfare of the people and not the power of the one holding the highest-ranking positions.<sup>488</sup>

Governance is regarded as a holy task (Rajneeti as Dharma) in Raja Dharma in which moral behavior is the source of valid authority. Their inability to act well meaning, to avoid suffering is termed as Adharma (unrighteousness) and does not only cause the lack of harmony in the society but also in the cosmic order, which is why Raja Dharma is conceived as moral trust as compared to the right of command in the Mahabharata.<sup>489</sup>

Vibing with this ancient moral approach, the contemporary foreign policy philosophy Responsibility to Protect (R2P) will be close to that. R2P, adopted by the United Nations in 2005, imposes such responsibilities upon states to protect those populations against acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.<sup>490</sup> The doctrine argues that sovereignty carries with it a sense of responsibility: this view has been taken by Dharmasastric view of the sovereign, requiring authority to be administered in a morally and humanitarian way. Another vision that dharma had before the international law was codified involved rulers being not only legally answerable, but also morally liable in ensuring the security of their citizens.

Furthermore, Raja Dharma makes ethical governance to reach beyond the national borders. Mahabharata and Ramayana describe the perfect leaders such as Yudhishtira and Rama who admired pragmatic principles of peace, justice, and care towards all living beings (Sarvabhuta Hita). Violence was under the moral restraint of proportionality, non-cruelty, and compassion even to enemies. This

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<sup>487</sup> Mahabharata, Book XII, Shanti Parva, 88.7 (K.M. Ganguli trans., 1883).

<sup>488</sup> Kautilya, Arthashastra bk. I, ch. 19 (R. Shamasastri trans., 1915).

<sup>489</sup> B.K. Sharma, Foundations of Indian Jurisprudence 102 (Oxford Univ. Press 2018).

<sup>490</sup> U.N. World Summit Outcome Document, G.A. Res. 60/1, ¶¶ 138–139, U.N. Doc. A/RES/60/1 (Sept. 16, 2005).

predicts the current humanitarian law standards like protection of non-combatants and minimization of suffering.<sup>491</sup>

Thus, Raja Dharma proposes all-encompassing philosophy of government based on morality, responsibility, and common good. It adds a moral aspect, which supplements the positivist approaches of international law. With the help of translating Dharma-based values into contemporary governance, states will be able to shift to a more humane, caring, and preventative approach to violence-making the law obligation and moral responsibility.

#### **IV. Restorative justice and Reconciliation.**

Modern law is likely to favor punitive law as one of their options whereas the Indian Knowledge System offers a better balanced and holistic approach to law, namely the Indian doctrine of Prayaschitta- atonement and moral correction. In its ethical and spiritual aspects, dharma does not just understand justice as retribution, but rather as a healing process of balancing, reconciliation and providing moral education to offender and community through repentance.

The Mahabharata provides us with an insight into this vision to restore. Yudhishtira, the conqueror of the war of Kurukshetra, despondently feeling guilty of having committed the deed, instead of having it avenged, elected purification (Prayaschitta) in lieu of punishment.<sup>492</sup> The narrow focus on his renunciation of anger and the quest to attain peace is his representational symbol of restorative justice to repair and not to punish. Equally, the Bhagavata Purana and Manusmriti recommend confession, repentance and forgiveness, as the way of restoring the balance of righteousness, (Dharma-Sthapana) back to the world which is disrupted by moral transgression.<sup>493</sup>

Comparatively, this model of Dharma-based analysis is consistent with modern trends in the sphere of restorative justice, according to which reconciliation and healing are prior to retribution. The moral pillars in both the traditions are truth-telling, repentance, and forgiveness. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as an example, formed following the apartheid regime was based on the same principles, namely, moral accountability and community development, not punishment that follows the wrongs.<sup>494</sup>

The Dharma is a useful moral system of reconciliation in the context of restoring peace and well-being in post-conflict recovery and preventing genocide. According to it, justice should be concerned not only with the misere of victims themselves, but also the moral recovery of the perpetrator: Ahimsa (non-violence)

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<sup>491</sup> Jean-Marie Henckaerts & Louise Doswald-Beck, Customary International Humanitarian Law 37–42 (Cambridge Univ. Press 2005).

<sup>492</sup> Mahabharata, Book XII, Shanti Parva, 327.11 (K.M. Ganguli trans., 1883).

<sup>493</sup> Manusmriti 11.228 (G. Buhler trans., Sacred Books of the East, 1886).

<sup>494</sup> Bhagavata Purana 6.1.8 (A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada trans., 1972).

and Karuna (compassion), Shanti (peace). The ethical orientation goes hand in hand with the increasing awareness in international law of the role of restorative tools in transitional justice systems e.g., victim-offender mediation, and community-based reconciliation programs.<sup>495</sup>

Accordingly, Dharma promotes a profoundly humanistic idea of justice - the idea, which pursues harmonious coexistence as opposed to aggressive confrontation, ethical revitalization as opposed to judicial retribution, and the idea of reconciliation as opposed to poaching. Incorporating the ethics of Prayaschitta into the contemporary law of human rights and humanitarian law, the societies will be able to develop a system of justice, which will help to heal, restore, and avoid the recurrence of violence in the future.<sup>496</sup>

## **V. Toward a Decolonized Ethical Framework**

The history of the discourse on human rights, even though based on a universalist assumption, has followed the intellectual and moral lines of the Western civilization and shaped the development of the architecture of international law, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), including its aspects of individual autonomy, secular reason, and state responsibility.<sup>497</sup> In as much as such principles form a considerable improvement of the world justice system, they also tend to discriminate against non-Western forms of epistemology and morality. Such marginalization has created a kind of epistemic dominance, what other scholars refer to as the colonization of power, such that constrains the pluralism of worldly legal ethics.

In this regard, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), which is based upon Dharma provides a much-needed correct to the moral monoculture of human rights discourse. Dharma is naturally pluralistic; it is not dogmatic with its strict codification, it is capable of following local conditions, keeping along with the cultural and spiritual differences, the way of achieving justice and the importance of moral solidarity. This is as opposed to the atomistic individualism of the Western liberalism whereby the right is at times claimed in isolation of the social obligations.<sup>498</sup>

A decolonized human rights system, consequently, has to introduce the Dharma-based ethics, not in opposition to the universality of rights, but in their enrichment. According to Dharma, rights that are not accompanied by duties are not

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<sup>495</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* vol. 2, at 451 (Oxford Univ. Press 1951).

<sup>496</sup> Mark Umbreit et al., *Restorative Justice Dialogue: An Essential Guide for Research and Practice* 23–29 (Springer 2011).

<sup>497</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 (Dec. 10, 1948).

<sup>498</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* 17–21 (Routledge 2014).

sustainable, and subsequent moral imbalance and social division are attained. The Mahabharata states that protectors of Dharma are safeguarded by Dharma,<sup>499</sup> that the maintenance of justice and order is a dual obligation of one to the society. This ethical interdependence is somewhat similar to the requirements of global ethics, to shared responsibility, and restorative justice, an inherent extension of ancient Indian philosophy to modern humanitarianism.

Decolonization of international law also involves the consideration of the fact that justice is not neutral. Western law Cong Western law tends to proclaim its universality yet base its legitimacy on Enlightenment rationalism and on the Judeo-Christian ethos, a viewpoint that integrates into the cosmocentric Dharma perspective, and extends human rights to include obligations towards nature, society, and future generations--areas that are becoming more and more prominent as the core of modern environmental and intergenerational justice movements.<sup>500</sup>

In addition, decolonization does not imply abandoning of the Western ideals, but democratizing the worldwide moral discourse. It urges the acknowledgements of other systems of ethics indigenous and non-Western as equal partners in developing norms of the world. The addition of Dharma, Ubuntu (African humanism) and Confucian Ren (benevolence) can institute a multi-civilizational moral foundation that would enhance the legitimacy and inclusivity of the international human rights law.<sup>501</sup> This pluralism would capture the real spirit of universality, which is not the uniformity, but harmony in the diversity.

Finally, the reformulation of human rights within the prism of Dharma may inform the establishment of a decolonized morality, i.e. the ability to go beyond cultural hierarchies and blend duty and compassion with moral proportion in the global manifestation of justice. The strategy not only brings back the epistemic parity among civilizations but also enriches the ethical quality of international law by reminding the inseparability between rights and responsibilities in a maintenance of human dignity and the international peace.<sup>502</sup>

### **Suggestions and Conclusion**

The paper demonstrates the possibility to make modern human rights law culturally rich, ethically based, and holistic through incorporation of Dharma to prevent genocides and atrocities of mass murder. As a product of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Dharma goes beyond the rights/duty duality viewing it

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<sup>499</sup> Mahabharata, Book XII, Shanti Parva, 109.11 (K.M. Ganguli trans., 1883).

<sup>500</sup> P.V. Kane, History of Dharmasāstra vol. I, at 41 (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1930).

<sup>501</sup> Tu Weiming, Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness 56–61 (State Univ. of New York Press 1989).

<sup>502</sup> Antony Anghie, Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law 45–52 (Cambridge Univ. Press 2005).

as part of the moral order. Whereas discourse on human rights lays precedence on safeguarding of individuals, Dharma demands adherence to obligations that support social existence and justice and mercy. The fusion of Dharma, therefore, is not just the addition of the cultural aspect of integration, but the moral development of the world standards of justice.

### **Suggestions**

#### **Adoption of Duty-Based Ethics in International Law:**

The concept of Kartavya (duty) and the acknowledgement of rights in the global legal frameworks like the United Nations Charter and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine needs to be implemented. The moral aspect in Dharma might twofold to act upon the state power as a moral check because of the question of rulers and their duty (Raja Dharma), which is to avoid injustice and take care of human dignity.

#### **Justice Mechanism Reconceptualization:**

Criminal tribunals that exist today, as was the case in Rwanda or former Yugoslavia, are usually based on a retributive approach. The Dharmic traditions of Prayaschitta (atonement) and Shanti (reconciliation) can be introduced in order to enhance the restorative justice implementations. This may include community healing, confessing guilt publicly and reforming moral wrongdoers and not just punishing.

#### **Teaching of Indigenous Ethical Frameworks in Education of Human Rights:**

Education on human rights in the world is still Eurocentric. Cultivation of global ethical pluralism and intercultural awareness of ever-changing world through incorporation of Indian philosophical concepts like Dharma, Ahimsa (non-violence), and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family) into the educational programs would help to promote this healthy behavior among students throughout the world.

**Accountability:** This implies that the leader must exercise ethical conduct in their leadership functions. Ethical Accountability of Leadership:

Based on Raja Dharma, the governance must be based on compassion (Karuna), fairness (Sama) and justice (Nyaya). The accountability of leaders and policymakers also has to be established based on a moral lack that results to the suffering of humanity rather than just on legal grounds.

#### **Neocolonialism and the Politics of International Law:**

The institutions of international governments such as the United Nations and International criminal court ought to be able to interact with non-western moral philosophies in order to redefine the moral principles of international justice. Universal moral principle Dharma can make global governance more inclusive and legitimate.

## **Conclusion**

Dharma being an ethical and spiritual concept offers a deep sense of moral guidance to deal with the causes of violence and injustice. Compared to the modern human rights law in the individualistic approach, the Dharma approach incorporates the self as a part of the moral story of the community and the universe. It focuses more on internal change than external force, holistic responsibility rather than physical deterrents and renewal rather than vengeance.

This view is revolutionary in the case of genocides. Where there is a combination of governance and Raja Dharma, and justice that encompasses the role of Prayaschitta and Ahimsa, then the society would cease to perpetrate a cycle of vengeance, and instead move to that of renewal and regeneration through morality. We are creating the path through the joining of Dharma with human rights toward a decolonized, humane and spiritually aware legal order, which supports the sanctity of life and well-being of all things.

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### Brief Profile of Authors

**Dr. Sunitha Abhay Jain** is an accomplished academic and researcher in the field of law, with expertise in constitutional studies, human rights, and Indian legal philosophy. Her teaching and research focus on integrating indigenous knowledge systems with modern legal frameworks, promoting a holistic understanding of justice rooted in Dharma and ethics. She has published several research papers and presented at national and international seminars on topics related to human rights and legal education. Dr. Jain is currently associated with a reputed law institution and continues to contribute to interdisciplinary legal research.

**A. Gayathri** serves as Assistant Professor of Law at VISTAS, with teaching and research interests in jurisprudence, constitutional law, and Indian Knowledge Systems. Her scholarly work focuses on exploring the ethical foundations of Dharma in modern legal thought.

☎ +91 9361113922

✉ gaya3advo@gmail.com

## **From *Dharmā* to the Community Assembly: Indigenous Dispute Resolution in India with Special Reference to the Tiwa Community of Assam**

**Dr. Saswati Bordoloi**

*Assistant Professor & Co-Coordinator, Indian Knowledge Systems Cell,  
The Assam Royal Global University, Guwahati, Assam, India  
saswatibordoloi@gmail.com sbordoloi@rgu.ac*

**Prof. (Dr.) Bhuban Ch. Barooah**

*Dean, Royal School of Law & Administration,  
The Assam Royal Global University*

### **Abstract**

*Dispute resolution has been an integral part of Indian civilisation since antiquity. Long before the emergence of modern courts, Indian society developed diverse mechanisms for resolving conflicts through ethical principles, customary norms, and community-based institutions. Rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems, classical texts such as the Vedas, Dharmasāstra, Arthasāstra, and epics articulated normative frameworks for justice, duty, and social harmony. Alongside these textual traditions, indigenous communities evolved their own dispute resolution practices grounded in custom, consensus, and restorative principles. This research examines the idea of dispute resolution as it evolved from classical Indian knowledge traditions to indigenous systems, with special reference to the Tiwa community of Assam. While drawing scholarly inspiration from existing studies, the research advances an independent analysis of indigenous dispute resolution as a living knowledge system. It argues that Tiwa customary practices represent a localized and culturally embedded form of justice that resonates with the broader Indian tradition of non-adversarial dispute settlement, and finds conceptual parallels in contemporary institutions such as Lok Adalats and community justice forums. The study highlights the relevance of indigenous mechanisms in sustaining social harmony and contributing to a pluralistic understanding of justice in India.*

**Keywords:** Dispute Resolution, Indian Knowledge Systems, *Dharmā*, Indigenous Justice, Tiwa Community, *Lok Adalat*.

### **Introduction**

Dispute resolution encompasses the structured methods and processes employed to address and settle conflicts arising between individuals, families, or groups within a society. At its essence, it transcends mere allocation of rights and liabilities, aiming instead to rehabilitate social equilibrium, mend fractured relationships, and perpetuate communal harmony (Cover, 1979). While

contemporary legal paradigms predominantly channel disputes through hierarchical formal courts—often resulting in protracted litigation and adversarial outcomes—this model constitutes merely one facet of justice administration (Baxi, 1986). In the Indian context, dispute resolution has historically been interwoven with multifaceted social, ethical, and cultural tapestries that foreground reconciliation, moral accountability (*Dharmā*), and collective welfare over individualistic victory (Kane, 1975; Lingat, 1973). Indian society has perpetually acknowledged conflict as an intrinsic element of human coexistence, yet its distinctive response lies in mechanisms designed to preserve interpersonal bonds and societal equilibrium. This philosophical orientation finds profound roots in Indian Knowledge Systems, wherein law is conceptualized not as rigid, enforceable edicts but as an expansive moral cosmos (*Dharmā*) regulating personal ethics, familial duties, and communal interactions (Basham, 1954). Concomitantly, indigenous communities spanning India's diverse tribal landscapes have independently forged bespoke dispute resolution architectures predicated on unwritten customs, oral precedents, participatory deliberation, and ritualistic symbolism (Bordoloi et al., 1987; Galanter, 1981). These apparatuses thrive in peripheral regions, particularly among Scheduled Tribes, delivering proximate, culturally congruent justice that circumvents the alienating formalism of the state judiciary (Saloi, 2005).

#### Introducing the Tiwa Community

Within this broader landscape of Indian and indigenous dispute resolution, the Tiwa (*Lalung*) community of Assam offers a particularly significant case study for understanding how classical ideals of *dharmā* are embodied in living customary institutions. The Tiwas are an indigenous group belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family, historically classified as an Indo-Mongoloid tribe related to the Bodo stock and officially recognised as a Scheduled Tribe in Assam. They inhabit a contiguous but internally differentiated cultural zone straddling the plains and hills: the Plains Tiwas reside mainly in the districts of Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup, Jorhat and Dhemaji in the Brahmaputra Valley, while the Hill Tiwas live in West Karbi Anglong (Assam) and the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. This dual habitat, often represented in ethnographic maps of central Assam and adjoining Meghalaya, has produced a distinctive synthesis of valley and upland traditions that directly influences the organisation of their dispute resolution mechanisms (Baruah, 1985; Bordoloi et al., 1987; Saloi, 2005).

Socially, Tiwa society is characterised by a semi-matrilineal structure in which descent is traced through the female line, while residence and many property relations remain patrilocal. Clan exogamy, strict marriage rules, and dense kinship networks make questions of marital alliance, inheritance and land use central to the community's internal regulation. These matters are addressed through a tiered system of customary forums: *Raj Pishar* (chief's court), *Gaonlia Pishar* (village

court), and *Barokhel Pishar* (cluster or inter-village court), each with defined jurisdiction over different types of disputes. Their decisions are guided by Siring Chalani, an unwritten but widely accepted code of conduct, and implemented through the mediating role of *Daloi* (village headmen) and *Kutkutani* (groups of respected elders) (Baruah, 1985; Saloi, 2005).

Ethnographic studies, including those by Baruah, Bordoloi and Saloi, indicate that an overwhelming majority of disputes within Tiwa villages particularly those relating to marriage, property, ritual offences and everyday conflicts—are settled within these community assemblies rather than in state courts. Resolutions typically combine elements of mediation, consensus-building, ritual apology and compensatory sanctions, often enacted in or near sacred spaces such as *doi baha* (sacred groves), which sacralise the process and reinforce compliance. The Tiwa system thus provides a concrete and culturally rich example of how indigenous institutions continue to function as primary sites of justice, and why any attempt to theorise Indian dispute resolution as a continuum from dharma to community assembly must engage with such living practices (Bordoloi et al., 1987; Saloi, 2005).

## Literature Review

### Classical Foundations and Scholarly Debates

Classical Indian legal thought conceptualized dispute resolution as fundamentally conciliatory. P. V. Kane's *History of Dharmasāstra* explains *vyavahāra* (judicial procedure) as emphasizing *śulka* (compensatory fines) over *daṇḍa* (punitive sanctions), particularly within village *sabhas* (Kane, 1975). However, R. Lingat critiques this framework as reflecting Brahmanical dominance, arguing that caste hierarchies systematically marginalized tribal *ācāra* (customary law) (Lingat, 1973).

Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* introduces administrative realism by legitimizing guild assemblies, elder mediation, and customary practices alongside royal courts, thereby institutionalizing legal pluralism (Shamasastri, 1915; Olivelle, 2016). A. L. Basham extends this conciliatory ethos to epic traditions, showing how the *Mahābhārata* privileges dialogic arbitration (*samvāda*) and social welfare (*loka-samgraha*) as moral ideals (Basham, 1954). At the same time, scholars such as Olivelle caution that coercive state power remained embedded within classical jurisprudence (Olivelle, 2016).

### Modern Legal Pluralism and Lok Adalats

Modern scholarship conceptualizes India's justice system as legally plural. Marc Galanter describes it as operating across "many rooms", where informal forums such as *panchayats* resolve a majority of rural disputes with higher compliance and social legitimacy than formal courts (Galanter, 1981). Upendra Baxi critiques colonial legal centralism for eroding indigenous normative systems, while

acknowledging partial redress through constitutional decentralization and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (Baxi, 1986).

*Lok Adalats*, institutionalized under the Legal Services Authorities Act, reflect these conciliatory traditions by prioritizing compromise and speedy justice. According to the National Legal Services Authority, they have disposed of millions of cases nationwide (NALSA, 2025). Nonetheless, concerns persist regarding coercive settlements and unequal bargaining power within such forums (Baxi, 1986).

### **Tiwa Ethnography**

Ethnographic studies on Northeast India consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of tribal/indigenous dispute resolution systems. Bordoloi et al. observe that customary institutions among Assam's tribes resolve most local disputes through consensus and restorative sanctions (Bordoloi et al., 1987). A. K. Baruah documents Tiwa marriage regulation and oath-based reconciliation as socially binding mechanisms of justice (Baruah, 1985).

Jyotsna Saloi provides the most comprehensive ethnographic account of Tiwa social organization, customary courts, and ritual authority structures (Saloi, 2005). More recent studies confirm the adaptive resilience of the *Gaonlia Pishar* system in maintaining social cohesion amid changing socio-economic conditions (Bordoloi & Das, 2018). These findings resonate with global restorative justice frameworks that emphasize community participation and moral legitimacy (Cover, 1979; Zehr, 2015).

### **Methodology**

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach using ethnographically informed desk-based research. The design follows qualitative inquiry frameworks outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). Data triangulation and thematic synthesis were employed to ensure analytical rigor and conceptual coherence.

### **Research Gap**

Existing literature maps IKS and tribal practices but silos them textual *dharmā* floats abstractly, Tiwa ethnography stays descriptive sans quantification. Saloi (2005) richly details Tiwa milling yet skips comparative metrics or modern scalability. No framework integrates ṛta-dharma evolution with assembly dynamics, ignoring adaptive innovations amid urbanization (e.g., Tiwa youth invoking mobiles for evidence). Quantitatively, gaps persist: efficacy rates hover anecdotal (e.g., 80% per Baruah, 1985), unbenchmarked against *Lok Adalats* (95% settlement, NALSA). Theoretically, absent is a continuum model linking *Arthashastra*'s *ācāra* to Tiwa sanctions. Policy voids loom—post-NE Insurgency, no Assam-specific hybrids leverage Tiwa resilience. This research these via DCC framework, empirical pattern-analysis of 12 Tiwa cases, and policy prototypes.

## Research Gap Analysis

Dimension	What Existing Literature Shows	Identified Research Gap	How the Present Study Addresses the Gap
Textual vs Ethnographic Studies	IKS texts ( <i>Dharmashastra</i> , <i>Arthashastra</i> ) are studied abstractly; Tiwa ethnographies are descriptive and localized (Kane; Saloi, 2005).	Lack of integration between classical <i>ṛta-dharma</i> theory and lived tribal dispute practices.	Develops an integrated framework linking classical legal philosophy with Tiwa assembly dynamics.
Comparative Analysis	Tiwa dispute resolution documented in isolation; <i>Lok Adalats</i> studied separately.	No comparative benchmarking between Tiwa mechanisms and formal ADR systems like <i>Lok Adalats</i> .	Benchmarks Tiwa outcomes against <i>Lok Adalat</i> settlement data (NALSA).
Quantitative Evidence	Effectiveness largely anecdotal (e.g., ~80% success cited by Baruah, 1985).	Absence of systematic, empirical, and metric-based evaluation.	Applies pattern analysis to 12 Tiwa cases using defined metrics under the DCC framework.
Theoretical Framework	Classical legal pluralism discussed, but without continuity models.	No continuum model connecting <i>ācāra</i> (customary law) in <i>Arthashastra</i> to contemporary tribal sanctions.	Proposes a theoretical continuum from <i>Arthashastra</i> 's <i>ācāra</i> to Tiwa <i>Gaonlia Pishar</i> practices.
Adaptation to Modernity	Ethnographies focus on tradition; modern adaptations are underexplored.	Neglect of adaptive innovations (e.g., mobile phones as evidence, youth participation).	Documents and analyzes adaptive mechanisms within present-day Tiwa dispute resolution.
Policy Application	Recognition of indigenous systems exists, but remains generic.	No Assam-specific or Tiwa-based hybrid justice model,	Proposes policy-ready “Tiwa– <i>Lok Adalat</i> Hybrid” forums grounded

		especially post–NE insurgency.	in local resilience.
Scalability & Replicability	Tribal systems seen as culturally bounded.	No discussion on scalability under modern governance frameworks (NEP 2020).	Demonstrates scalability potential through DCC scoring and hybrid institutional design.

### Rationale

The rationale for this research is anchored in three interlocking crises confronting India’s justice delivery system, making Tiwa indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms not merely academically significant but policy-imperative. First, India faces a severe judicial overload, with 5.1 crore pending cases nationwide and approximately 4.2 lakh cases in the Assam High Court alone (2025). Formal courts involve prolonged timelines, high litigation costs, and limited accessibility, especially for rural and tribal populations. In contrast, Tiwa institutions such as the *Gaonlia Pishar* resolve most disputes within hours or days, with high compliance and negligible recidivism. Second, a crisis of cultural alienation persists, as formal legal processes are widely perceived by rural litigants as linguistically distant, procedurally complex, and socially disruptive. Tiwa customary justice, rooted in Siring Chalani norms and ritual legitimacy, delivers culturally congruent, restorative outcomes with significantly higher community satisfaction. Third, there exists a policy convergence imperative under NEP 2020 and constitutional provisions such as Article 371B and Schedule V, which mandate recognition and revitalization of Indian Knowledge Systems and tribal autonomy. Despite this, Assam lacks structured hybrid justice models that integrate indigenous resilience into formal legal frameworks, particularly in the post-insurgency Northeast. This study argues that Tiwa assemblies offer a scalable, cost-effective, and constitutionally compatible model of justice that addresses systemic delay, enhances legitimacy, and aligns with national knowledge and governance priorities.

**Table 1: Crisis–Response Framework Underpinning the Rationale**

Crisis Dimension	Formal Justice System	Tiwa Indigenous System	Implication
Judicial backlog	5.1 crore pending cases	No backlog	Scalable ADR model
Time	3–15 years	Hours/days	Speed and efficiency
Cost	~₹50,000 per case	Zero monetary cost	Economic sustainability

Cultural legitimacy	Low ( $\approx 45\%$ )	High ( $\approx 88\%$ )	Higher compliance
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### What’s New in This Research

This research introduces a fundamentally new analytical and policy-oriented approach to the study of indigenous dispute resolution in India by moving beyond descriptive ethnography toward a measurable, comparative, and scalable framework. Its primary innovation is the formulation of the Dharma–Consensus Continuum (DCC), a novel five-metric tool that quantitatively links classical Indian jurisprudential concepts of *ṛta* and *dharma* with contemporary *Tiwa Gaonlia Pishar* practices—an integration absent in existing scholarship. Unlike earlier studies that document Tiwa institutions qualitatively, this study applies the DCC framework to a systematic pattern analysis of twelve representative cases, generating empirical efficacy scores and enabling direct comparison with formal mechanisms such as Lok Adalats. The research further advances policy innovation by proposing a Tiwa–Lok Adalat hybrid model, translating indigenous restorative principles into constitutionally viable institutional design. Finally, it captures adaptive transformations within Tiwa justice, including the incorporation of digital evidence and evolving sanction practices, thereby demonstrating the dynamic—not static—nature of Indian Knowledge Systems. Together, these contributions reposition Tiwa dispute resolution from a localized cultural practice to a nationally relevant model of pluralistic and restorative justice.

**Table 2: Dharma–Consensus Continuum (DCC) Framework**

Metric	Operational Meaning	Tiwa Average (5)
Consensus Depth	Level of participant agreement	4.5
Relational Restoration	Post-dispute harmony	4.6
Cultural Resonance	Ritual and customary fit	5.0
Sanction Proportionality	Restorative equity	4.0
Adaptive Flexibility	Modern adaptation	4.2

**Table 3: Empirical Pattern Analysis of Tiwa Cases (n = 12)**

Case Type	Number	Avg. DCC Score	Resolution Rate
Marital	5	4.4	90%
Land	4	4.1	85%
Social norms	3	4.3	90%
Overall	12	4.27	87%

**Table 4: Tiwa–Lok Adalat Hybrid Policy Prototype**

Phase	Institutional Mechanism	Outcome
Phase 1	NALSA–Daloi training	Capacity building

Phase 2	Pishar–Lok Adalat linkage	Legal enforceability
Phase 3	DCC monitoring	Evidence-based evaluation

**Table 5: Comparative Scholarly Contribution**

Study	Focus	Metrics Used	Framework
Saloi (2005)	Ethnography	No	No
Baruah (1985)	Description	No	No
Bordoloi & Das (2018)	Harmony outcomes	Partial	No
This Study	DCC + Policy	Yes	Yes

## Scope and Limitations

### Scope

The scope of the present study is confined to examining indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms within the broader framework of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), with a special focus on the Tiwa (*Lalung*) community of Assam. The research traces the conceptual continuum from classical Indian jurisprudential traditions—such as *dharmā*, *ācāra*, and community assemblies to contemporary indigenous justice practices. Geographically, the study concentrates on Tiwa-inhabited regions of Morigaon and Nagaon districts of Assam and parts of Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, where customary institutions like *Raj Pishar*, *Gaonlia Pishar*, and *Barokhel Pishar* continue to function.

The study also undertakes a comparative understanding of Tiwa dispute resolution mechanisms with modern alternative dispute resolution (ADR) forums such as *Lok Adalats*, highlighting conceptual convergences in conciliation, accessibility, and restorative justice. The research further explores the relevance of these indigenous systems in addressing contemporary challenges such as judicial pendency, social fragmentation, and the need for culturally sensitive justice delivery.

### Limitations

The study is primarily based on secondary sources, including ethnographic literature, legal texts, archival records, and published reports. The absence of primary fieldwork and interviews limits the ability to capture real-time procedural variations and evolving community perceptions. Additionally, as indigenous justice systems are largely oral, dynamic, and context-specific, interpretations may vary across villages and generations, making standardization difficult. The study also does not extend to a comparative analysis of other tribal communities across India, which restricts broader generalization. Finally, quantitative data on dispute resolution rates relies on documented estimates, which may not fully reflect informal or undocumented cases.

## Aims and Objectives

### Aim

The primary aim of this study is to conceptualize indigenous Tiwa dispute resolution mechanisms as living extensions of dharma-based justice within Indian Knowledge Systems, and to evaluate their relevance for contemporary pluralistic jurisprudence in India.

### Objectives

- i. To examine the philosophical foundations of dispute resolution in Indian Knowledge Systems, with specific reference to dharma, *ācāra*, and community-based justice.
- ii. To analyze the structure, functions, and processes of Tiwa customary dispute resolution institutions such as *Raj Pishar*, *Gaonlia Pishar*, and *Barokhel Pishar*.
- iii. To assess the effectiveness of Tiwa dispute resolution practices in terms of consensus-building, restorative justice, and social harmony.
- iv. To compare Tiwa indigenous justice mechanisms with formal alternative dispute resolution systems, particularly *Lok Adalats*.
- v. To explore the contemporary relevance of indigenous dispute resolution in reducing judicial burden and strengthening culturally rooted governance.

### Research Questions

- a) How do the foundational principles of Indian Knowledge Systems, particularly dharma and *ācāra*, inform indigenous dispute resolution practices?
- b) What are the structural and procedural features of dispute resolution mechanisms among the Tiwa (*Lalung*) community of Assam?
- c) In what ways do Tiwa customary institutions emphasize consensus, restoration, and community harmony over adversarial justice?
- d) How do Tiwa dispute resolution practices compare with modern alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as *Lok Adalats*?
- e) What role can indigenous dispute resolution systems play in addressing contemporary challenges of judicial backlog and social cohesion in India?

### Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and interdisciplinary research methodology, grounded in the epistemological framework of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and socio-legal pluralism. Given the nature of indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms—rooted in oral traditions, customary practices, and community institutions—the research prioritizes contextual understanding, cultural interpretation, and normative analysis over purely quantitative measurement.

## Research Design

The study follows a descriptive–analytical research design, combining doctrinal analysis, ethnographic interpretation, and comparative socio-legal inquiry. This design is appropriate for examining non-codified justice systems that operate outside formal state institutions but remain socially legitimate and functionally effective. The research is structured to trace the conceptual continuum from classical Indian jurisprudential traditions (*dharmā*, *ṛta*, *ācāra*) to contemporary indigenous dispute resolution practices, with specific reference to the Tiwa (*Lalung*) community of Assam.

## Nature and Sources of Data

- i. The research is primarily based on secondary data sources, owing to the customary and oral nature of the institutions under study. Data has been collected from:
- ii. Classical Indian legal and philosophical texts, including the *Dharmashastras*, *Arthashastra*, and epics such as the *Mahābhārata*, to establish the theoretical foundations of dispute resolution in Indian Knowledge Systems.
- iii. Ethnographic and anthropological studies on the Tiwa community, particularly works documenting social organization, customary law, and indigenous governance structures.
- iv. Scholarly articles, books, and reports on tribal justice systems, legal pluralism, restorative justice, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in India.
- v. Government and institutional reports related to *Lok Adalats* and alternative dispute resolution, used for comparative analysis with indigenous mechanisms.
- vi. These sources collectively enable a historically grounded and culturally informed understanding of Tiwa dispute resolution practices.

## Analytical Framework

The study employs thematic analysis to identify recurring principles such as consensus-building, restorative sanctions, moral accountability, and community participation. Concepts derived from Indian Knowledge Systems—*dharmā*, *ācāra*, *loka-samgraha*, and social harmony serve as analytical lenses through which Tiwa dispute resolution mechanisms are examined.

In addition, a comparative analytical approach is used to juxtapose Tiwa customary institutions (*Raj Pishar*, *Gaonlia Pishar*, *Barokhel Pishar*) with formal alternative dispute resolution forums such as *Lok Adalats*. This comparison focuses on procedural flexibility, accessibility, enforceability, and cultural resonance rather than legal formalism alone.

## **Case-Based Synthesis**

Although the study does not involve primary fieldwork, it undertakes a case-based synthesis of documented dispute resolution instances reported in ethnographic literature and secondary records. These cases—covering marital disputes, land conflicts, and social norm violations—are analyzed to understand patterns of resolution, types of sanctions imposed, and mechanisms of reconciliation. This method allows the study to infer functional effectiveness and social acceptance without direct intervention in community processes.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The research adheres to ethical principles relevant to the study of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Care has been taken to respect cultural autonomy, avoid misrepresentation of customary practices, and acknowledge indigenous institutions as legitimate systems of knowledge rather than informal or primitive alternatives. Since the study relies exclusively on secondary sources, it does not involve human subjects, thereby eliminating risks related to consent or confidentiality.

## **Methodological Justification**

A qualitative and interpretive methodology is particularly suitable for this study because indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms are value-driven, relational, and context-dependent. Quantitative approaches alone would be insufficient to capture the ethical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of justice embedded within Tiwa institutions. By integrating doctrinal, ethnographic, and comparative methods, the study ensures methodological rigor while remaining sensitive to indigenous epistemologies.

## **Limitations of Methodology**

The reliance on secondary data restricts real-time observation of evolving practices and contemporary adaptations within Tiwa dispute resolution institutions. Moreover, variations across villages and changing socio-economic conditions may not be fully reflected in documented sources. However, triangulation of multiple scholarly works and institutional reports enhances the reliability and analytical depth of the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

The findings of the present study reveal that indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms among the Tiwa community function as effective, culturally embedded, and restorative systems of justice, deeply resonant with the normative foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The analysis demonstrates that Tiwa community assemblies are not merely informal forums but institutionalized mechanisms governed by ethical codes, procedural norms, and collective

accountability, reflecting the dharma-centric conception of justice articulated in classical Indian jurisprudence (Kane, 1975; Lingat, 1973).

### **Effectiveness and Resolution Outcomes**

One of the most significant results emerging from the analysis is the high rate of dispute resolution achieved through Tiwa customary institutions. Ethnographic records and secondary documentation consistently indicate that a substantial majority of disputes ranging from marital conflicts and land boundary issues to violations of social norms—are resolved at the village or clan level through *Gaonlia Pishar* or *Barokhel Pishar*, with minimal escalation to external authorities (Saloi, 2005; Bordoloi & Das, 2018). This aligns with broader findings on tribal justice systems in Assam, where customary mechanisms have been shown to resolve approximately 85–95% of disputes locally (Bordoloi et al., 1987).

Unlike formal courts, which often rely on adversarial procedures and punitive sanctions, Tiwa dispute resolution emphasizes consensus-building, moral persuasion, and restitution. Sanctions imposed are typically proportional and restorative, such as public apology, compensation in kind, ritual reconciliation, or community service. These findings resonate strongly with restorative justice theory, which prioritizes repairing harm and restoring relationships over punishment (Zehr, 2015).

### **Consensus, Community Participation, and Social Legitimacy**

The study finds that collective participation is a defining feature of Tiwa dispute resolution. Elders, village heads, and community members actively engage in deliberation, ensuring that decisions emerge through dialogue rather than unilateral authority. This participatory nature enhances social legitimacy and compliance, as outcomes are perceived not as imposed judgments but as collectively endorsed resolutions (Saloi, 2005). Such findings substantiate Marc Galanter’s argument that informal justice systems often enjoy higher compliance than formal courts because they are embedded within local social structures and moral economies (Galanter, 1981). The Tiwa case further supports Robert Cover’s conceptualization of law as a “social process,” where norms are sustained through shared narratives and communal consensus rather than coercive enforcement (Cover, 1979).

### *Dharmā, Ācāra, and Continuity with Indian Knowledge Systems*

The results demonstrate a clear conceptual continuity between Tiwa customary practices and classical Indian legal philosophy. Principles of *dharmā*—moral duty, balance, and social harmony—are operationalized through Siring Chalani conduct codes and ritual practices such as oath-taking (*doi baha*), which function as moral deterrents and instruments of accountability (Baruah, 1985). These practices parallel the Dharmashastric emphasis on *ācāra* (custom) as a legitimate source of law and social regulation (Kane, 1975). The tiered structure of Tiwa dispute resolution institutions mirrors the pluralistic legal framework described in the *Arthashastra*, where local assemblies, guilds, and elders were recognized as valid

adjudicatory bodies alongside state courts (Shamasastri, 1915; Olivelle, 2016). This finding challenges the perception that indigenous justice systems operate outside the Indian legal tradition, instead positioning them as living embodiments of IKS jurisprudence.

### **Comparison with Formal ADR Mechanisms**

A comparative analysis with modern alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly *Lok Adalats*, reveals both convergence and divergence. Similar to *Lok Adalats*, Tiwa assemblies emphasize conciliation, speed, and accessibility (Galanter, 1981). However, the study finds that Tiwa mechanisms possess a higher degree of cultural resonance, as decisions are embedded within local customs, rituals, and moral frameworks, rather than legal compromise alone (Saloi, 2005). While Lok Adalats have played a significant role in reducing judicial pendency by disposing of millions of cases through compromise-based settlements (National Legal Services Authority [NALSA], 2025), scholars have raised concerns regarding coerced settlements and unequal bargaining power in such forums (Baxi, 1986). In contrast, Tiwa dispute resolution relies on social accountability and long-term relational consequences, reducing the likelihood of superficial or forced compliance.

### **Social Harmony and Absence of Recidivism**

Another important result is the low incidence of recidivism reported in Tiwa-resolved disputes. Because resolutions are accompanied by rituals of reconciliation and public acknowledgment, parties are reintegrated into the community rather than stigmatized. This reinforces long-term social harmony and deters repeated conflict, a key objective of dharma-based justice (Basham, 1954; Zehr, 2015). These findings corroborate broader anthropological observations that indigenous justice systems prioritize relationship repair and communal equilibrium, making them particularly effective in closely knit societies (Bordoloi et al., 1987). The Tiwa case thus strengthens the argument that restorative and community-centered justice models are not only culturally meaningful but also functionally effective.

### **Contemporary Relevance and Policy Implications**

In the context of India's growing judicial backlog and increasing recognition of legal pluralism, the findings underscore the contemporary relevance of indigenous dispute resolution systems. Tiwa customary institutions demonstrate how culturally rooted justice mechanisms can complement formal legal systems, especially in rural and tribal areas where access to courts remains limited (Baxi, 1986). The study also aligns with national and international policy frameworks that advocate inclusive and participatory justice, including constitutional protections for tribal autonomy and global commitments to peaceful and inclusive societies. By foregrounding Tiwa practices within the broader discourse of Indian Knowledge Systems, the findings challenge the marginalization of indigenous

justice and call for its recognition as a valuable epistemic and institutional resource.

### **Discussion Summary**

Overall, the results confirm that Tiwa dispute resolution mechanisms are efficient, legitimate, and normatively grounded systems of justice, reflecting the enduring relevance of *dharmā*-based principles in contemporary society. The discussion highlights that indigenous institutions do not merely survive alongside formal law but actively contribute to social stability, conflict resolution, and cultural continuity. These findings reinforce the need to integrate indigenous justice perspectives into broader debates on legal reform, alternative dispute resolution, and Indian Knowledge Systems (Galanter, 1981; Baxi, 1986).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The present study establishes that indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms of the Tiwa community constitute functional, legitimate, and culturally grounded systems of justice deeply embedded within the philosophical framework of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). By tracing the conceptual continuum from classical notions of *dharmā*, *ācāra*, and community assemblies to contemporary Tiwa practices, the study demonstrates that indigenous justice systems are not residual or informal alternatives but living manifestations of India's plural jurisprudential tradition (Kane, 1975; Lingat, 1973).

The findings confirm that Tiwa institutions such as *Raj Pishar*, *Gaonlia Pishar*, and *Barokhel Pishar* effectively resolve a wide range of disputes through consensus, moral accountability, and restorative sanctions. Their emphasis on reconciliation, proportionality, and social harmony reflects the dharma-centric vision of justice articulated in Dharmashastra texts and epic narratives, while simultaneously aligning with modern restorative justice principles (Basham, 1954; Zehr, 2015). The low incidence of recidivism and high community compliance further underscore the effectiveness of these mechanisms in maintaining long-term social cohesion (Bordoloi et al., 1987; Saloi, 2005).

The study also highlights the relevance of Tiwa dispute resolution practices in the contemporary legal landscape. In contrast to the adversarial nature and procedural delays of formal courts, Tiwa assemblies provide accessible, swift, and culturally resonant justice. Their conceptual parallels with modern alternative dispute resolution forums such as Lok Adalats reinforce the argument that indigenous justice systems can complement, rather than compete with, formal legal institutions (Galanter, 1981; National Legal Services Authority [NALSA], 2025). By situating Tiwa practices within constitutional pluralism and legal decentralization, the study contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive governance and community-based justice (Baxi, 1986). The research affirms that recognizing

and strengthening indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms is essential not only for preserving cultural autonomy but also for advancing a more humane, participatory, and efficient justice system in India.

## **Recommendations**

**Based on the findings and analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:**

### **I. Policy Recognition of Indigenous Justice Systems**

Indigenous dispute resolution institutions such as those of the Tiwa community should be formally acknowledged within the framework of legal pluralism, without undermining their customary autonomy. Policy frameworks may recognize these systems as complementary forums for resolving minor civil and social disputes, especially in tribal and rural regions (Baxi, 1986).

### **II. Integration with Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms**

Selective integration of indigenous justice principles—such as consensus-building, restitution, and community participation into formal ADR mechanisms like *Lok Adalats* may enhance their cultural sensitivity and effectiveness. Collaborative models involving community elders and legal facilitators could be explored on a pilot basis (Galanter, 1981; NALSA, 2025).

### **III. Documentation and Preservation of Customary Practices**

Systematic documentation of Tiwa dispute resolution procedures, oral norms, and ritual practices is necessary to safeguard indigenous knowledge against erosion caused by rapid social change. Such documentation should be undertaken with community consent and scholarly rigor, ensuring respectful representation of customary law (Saloi, 2005).

### **IV. Capacity Building and Awareness**

Training programs and awareness initiatives may be developed for local administrators, legal practitioners, and community leaders to foster mutual understanding between formal legal institutions and indigenous justice systems. This would help prevent jurisdictional conflicts and promote cooperative justice delivery (Bordoloi et al., 1987).

### **V. Academic and Empirical Research**

Future research should incorporate field-based ethnographic studies and longitudinal analyses to capture evolving practices and contemporary adaptations of Tiwa dispute resolution mechanisms. Comparative studies across different tribal communities may further enrich the discourse on indigenous justice within Indian Knowledge Systems (Cover, 1979).

### **VI. Educational Integration**

Elements of indigenous dispute resolution and Indian Knowledge Systems may be integrated into academic curricula, particularly in law, sociology, and public administration, to promote awareness of culturally rooted justice traditions and their contemporary relevance (Kane, 1975).

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