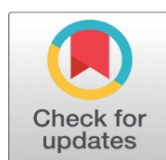
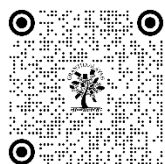


THE ETERNAL QUEST FOR *DHARMA*: UNVEILING THE ULTIMATE PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article begins an enlightening investigation of '*Dharma*,' a complex idea that is ingrained in many Indic traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Although it is frequently interpreted as duty, righteousness, or cosmic law, *Dharma* is an ultimate philosophy of life that defies easy description. This essay explores the historical development of *Dharma*, the various ways it has been interpreted by various philosophical traditions, and its significant ramifications for moral behavior, social harmony, and the search for ultimate truth. We want to reveal *Dharma* as a dynamic, changing principle that directs moral behavior, personal development, and the fulfillment of one's innate purpose by a critical analysis of ancient texts, philosophical writings, and modern interpretations. The essay offers a thorough framework for negotiating the complexity of human existence and reaching spiritual emancipation, arguing that the "eternal quest for *Dharma*" is a lived experience rather than just an intellectual endeavor.

Keywords: *Dharma*, Hindu Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy, Jain Philosophy, Ethics, Righteousness, Cosmic Law, Existential Philosophy, Spirituality, Liberation

1. INTRODUCTION

The constant pursuit of meaning and purpose is a hallmark of the human experience. People from many cultures and civilizations have struggled with basic issues including the nature of reality, the essence of the self, and how to live a satisfying life. The idea of "*Dharma*" provides a deep and thorough response to these existential questions in the Indic traditions. *Dharma* represents a supreme philosophy of life, a cosmic law that controls the cosmos, and a tenet for both individual and collective well-being. It is more than just a code of behavior or a collection of moral precepts.

Though most commonly linked to Hinduism, the term "*Dharma*" has significant resonance in Buddhism, Jainism, and other native South Asian philosophies. It can be interpreted in many different ways, from the basic basis of existence itself to cosmic order and personal obligations and virtues. In modern discourse, this complex web of meanings frequently results in an oversimplification or a limited grasp of *Dharma*. This article attempts to address this by conducting a thorough and perceptive investigation of *Dharma* with the goal of revealing its complex nature and its significant ramifications as the supreme philosophy of life.

The "eternal quest for *Dharma*" is a journey that is not limited by time or place. For thousands of years, philosophers, sages, and common people have been involved in this search, which has shaped civilizations and impacted people's lives.

By exploring its philosophical undertones, historical foundations, and real-world applications, we hope to shed light on *Dharma*'s ongoing significance in resolving the everlasting problems of human existence and promoting a route towards both individual and planetary harmony.

2. SOME CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Is *dharma* culturally relative or a universal constant?
- What does "ultimate existence" mean in *Dharma* according to different traditions?
- Can *Dharma* provide humanity with a single ethical framework?
- Does the conflict between fate and free will get resolved by *dharma*?
- In what ways does *Dharma* inform adaptability in a world that is changing?
- What applications does *Dharma* have in today's world?
- Does *Dharma* require a certain set of spiritual principles?
- In what ways does *Dharma* transcend theological doctrine?
- Can a "ultimate" "philosophy of existence" really exist?
- What epistemological difficulties arise when "unveiling" *Dharma*?

3. OBJECTIVES

The research aims to uncover the ultimate philosophy of being by thoroughly analyzing *Dharma* and describing its eternal importance and complicated character.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative and analytical research methodology based on secondary sources, which include relevant textbooks and journals, reprints of papers that have already been published, soft copies, including web pages, and e-reprints (pdf files) that have been obtained from websites.

5. TRACING THE ROOTS: DHARMA IN ANCIENT INDIC TRADITIONS

The origins of *Dharma* can be traced back to the Vedic period (c. 1500-500 BCE) in ancient India. In the *R̥gveda*, the term '*Dharma*' initially referred to fixed ordinances or established laws, often associated with ritualistic practices and cosmic order (Griffith, 1890). It represented the fundamental idea that kept the cosmos alive and made sure it operated as it should. The foundation for its later philosophical elaborations was established by this early insight.

As the Vedic period transitioned into the Upaniṣadic era (c. 800-200 BCE), the concept of *Dharma* began to acquire deeper philosophical and ethical dimensions. The *Upaniṣads*, which are philosophical treatises forming the concluding part of the *Vedas*, emphasized the interconnectedness of all existence and the importance of righteous conduct for spiritual realization. Here, *Dharma* started to be linked with *Ṛta*, the cosmic order, suggesting an inherent moral structure to the universe (Radhakrishnan, 1953). Following *Dharma* was thought to bring about inner peace and liberation by bringing oneself into alignment with this universal reality.

Adherence to *Dharma* was seen as aligning oneself with this cosmic truth, leading to inner harmony and liberation. The iconic dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*, a part of the *Mahābhārata*, profoundly elaborates on *Svadharmā* (one's own duty) and the importance of selfless action (*KarmaYoga*) as a path to *Dharma* (Easwaran, 2007). The *Rāmāyaṇa* similarly showcases the embodiment of *Dharma* through the character of Rāma, who epitomizes righteousness, duty, and ideal kingship.

6. DIVERSE INTERPRETATIONS: DHARMA ACROSS SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Although the idea of *Dharma* is universal, different Indic schools of thought have quite diverse interpretations and levels of emphasis on it.

6.1. DHARMA IN HINDU PHILOSOPHY

Dharma is a complex idea in Hinduism that includes social, moral, ethical, and religious obligations. It is frequently regarded as the proper lifestyle that upholds both the individual and society. There are several sorts of *dharma*:

Sanātana Dharma: Refers to the eternal and universal principles that apply to all beings, irrespective of their social standing or time period. These include virtues like truthfulness (*Satya*), non-violence (*Ahimsā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), and self-control (*Dama*) (Swami Vivekananda, 1896).

Varāśrama Dharma: Traditionally referred to the duties prescribed for individuals based on their social class (*Varṇa*) and stage of life (*Āśrama*). While this concept has been a subject of extensive debate and reform, its original intent was to foster social harmony and efficient functioning by assigning specific responsibilities (Olivelle, 1999).

Sva-Dharma: Emphasizes one's individual duty or inherent nature. The *Bhagavad Gītā* highlights the importance of performing one's *Svadharm* diligently, even if it seems imperfect, rather than attempting another's duty (Easwaran, 2007). This idea emphasizes the distinct route that each person needs to take.

Rāja Dharma: Relates to the responsibilities of a ruler, with a focus on justice, subject protection, and upholding moral principles.

Yuga Dharma: Refers to the particular *Dharma* that is appropriate for a given age or period, taking into account how ethical issues and societal demands change throughout time.

Beyond these classifications, *Dharma* in Hinduism is intrinsically linked to the concept of *Karma* (action and its consequences) and *Mokṣa* (liberation). Adhering to *Dharma* is believed to generate positive *Karma*, leading to favorable outcomes in this life and future rebirths, ultimately paving the way for liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*Samsāra*) (Zimmer, 1951).

6.2. DHARMA IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

In Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha, the universal principles of nature, and the ultimate truth are the main subjects of "*Dhamma*," the Pāli equivalent of "*Dharma*." The central components of the *Dhamma* are the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.

The Teachings of the Buddha: The *Dhamma* is the path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering. It encapsulates the Buddha's insights into the nature of existence, suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path to its cessation (Rahula, 1959).

Cosmic Law: Additionally, *dhamma* represents the innate order and interdependence of all occurrences. It alludes to the actual world, which is regulated by concepts like as sorrow (*Dukkha*), impermanence (*Anicca*), and non-self (*Anatta*). Buddhist practice is centered on comprehending and relating to these fundamental laws.

Righteous Conduct: While the emphasis is on inner transformation, the *Dhamma* also prescribes ethical conduct as an integral part of the path. The five precepts (*Pañcaśīla*) – abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants – are fundamental moral guidelines (Harvey, 2013).

The ultimate goal of Buddhism, as directed by the *Dhamma*, is to realize the true nature of reality in order to reach *Nirvāṇa*, a state of profound serenity and escape from suffering.

6.3. DHARMA IN JAIN PHILOSOPHY

'*Dharma*' has a special meaning in Jainism, mainly related to the basic elements or categories of reality (*Dravyas*), the inherent essence of things, and the way of virtuous action that leads to freedom.

Dravya (Substances): *Dharma* (along with *Adharma*, *Ākāśa*, *Kāla*, *Pudgala*, *Jīva*) is one of the six fundamental substances that constitute the universe. In this context, *Dharma* and *Adharma* are abstract principles that facilitate movement and rest, respectively (Jaini, 1979).

Innate Nature: *Dharma* also describes a substance's intrinsic qualities or nature. The *Dharma* of water, for example, is to flow.

Path of Conduct: Most significantly, *Dharma* in Jainism denotes the ethical and moral code that guides a practitioner towards liberation (*Mokṣa*). The Three Jewels of Jainism – Right Faith (*SamyakDarśana*), Right Knowledge (*SamyakJñāna*), and Right Conduct (*SamyakCharitra*) – collectively constitute the path of *Dharma*. The five great vows (*Mahāvratas*) – *Ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (chastity), and *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) – are central to *JainDharma* (Dundas, 2002).

The strict practice of self-control and non-violence, which aims to purify the soul and achieve omniscience and eternal happiness, is seen by Jains as the embodiment of the never-ending pursuit of *Dharma*.

7. THE ULTIMATE PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE: *DHARMA* AS A GUIDING LIGHT

Dharma's holistic and integrated approach to life makes it stand out as the ultimate philosophy of existence despite its many interpretations. It offers a thorough framework that covers social peace, cosmic order, spiritual enlightenment, and individual morality.

7.1. ETHICAL FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN CONDUCT

Fundamentally, *Dharma* provides a solid ethical basis for human behavior. It gives people a moral compass that directs them toward deeds that benefit not just themselves but also their families, communities, and the larger world. A just and peaceful society is built on the foundation of the *Dhārmic* values of truthfulness, non-violence, compassion, and self-control. The eternal precepts of *Dharma* provide a timeless and universal guide in a world that is becoming more and more preoccupied with moral relativism and ethical quandaries.

7.2. PATH TO PERSONAL GROWTH AND FULFILLMENT

The pursuit of *Dharma* is fundamentally a path of self-awareness and development. People develop virtues, overcome shortcomings, and gain a better understanding of themselves when their intentions and actions are in line with *Dhārmic* principles. *Svadharmā* is emphasized, which promotes self-reflection and the recognition of one's individual potential. This endeavor is about developing wisdom, discernment, and inner serenity rather than mindlessly following the rules. *Dhārmic* philosophies hold that living in accordance with one's real nature and making a constructive contribution to the world is the path to true fulfillment rather than accumulating material possessions.

7.3. ENSURING SOCIETAL HARMONY AND COSMIC ORDER

Beyond the personal sphere, *dharma* encompasses the welfare of the cosmos and society. *Rta* and the focus on social obligations draw attention to *Dharma*'s function in preserving social order and cosmic balance. Justice, equity, and stability are promoted when people and organizations behave in a way that is consistent with *Dharma*. On the other hand, chaos, misery, and dissolution result from *Adharma*, or unrighteousness. *Dharma*'s lasting significance stems from its capacity to offer a framework for creating communities that are compassionate, just, and sustainable.

7.4. GATEWAY TO SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

In the end, the never-ending pursuit of *Dharma* serves as a means of achieving spiritual freedom. The pursuit of *Dharma* is regarded as the fundamental route to overcoming the constraints of empirical existence and reaching one's full spiritual potential, whether it is *Mokṣa* in Hinduism, *Nirvāṇa* in Buddhism, or *Kaivalya* in Jainism. In addition to leading an ethical life, this entails meditation, self-discovery, and selfless service—practices that result in a fundamental shift in awareness. In this way, *dharma* provides a route to enduring freedom and tranquility by serving as a link between the ordinary and the transcendent.

8. THE ETERNAL QUEST IN THE MODERN WORLD

In a world that is becoming more linked and complex, the "eternal quest for *Dharma*" is still very important. The necessity for a guiding philosophy that can promote ethical leadership and sustainable living is highlighted by contemporary issues including social inequality, environmental deterioration, and moral dilemmas.

With its focus on interconnection, accountability, and non-violence, the tenets of *Dharma* provide insightful guidance for dealing with today's problems. For example, the idea of *Ahiṃsā* encompasses more than just preventing bodily injury; it also includes protecting the environment and using resources with awareness. By emphasizing *KarmaYoga* (selfless action), people can be motivated to improve society without worrying about results, which promotes a feeling of shared accountability.

However, *Dharma's* application in the contemporary world also calls for a critical reassessment and modification. For instance, traditional interpretations of *VarnāśramaDharma* must be reinterpreted in a way that advances social justice and equality rather than sustaining prejudice, taking into account their historical background. *Dharma's* flexibility and ability to change while holding fast to its fundamental ideas are what make it so special.

9. CONCLUSION

More than just a philosophical investigation, the "Eternal Quest for *Dharma*" is a deep and continuous journey that identifies the fundamental nature of human existence. From its ancient Vedic origins to its varied interpretations in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, *Dharma* is always seen as a holistic philosophy that directs personal behavior, promotes social harmony, and eventually leads to spiritual freedom.

Dharma is a dynamic and living philosophy that encourages ongoing reflection, moral behavior, and a profound comprehension of how all life is interconnected rather than being a static dogma. It provides a roadmap for a fair and caring world, a timeless moral compass, and a route to human development. The relentless pursuit of *Dharma* serves as a beacon of light in a society that is frequently marked by moral ambiguity and fragmentation, reminding people of their innate purpose and potential for ultimate fulfillment. Since *Dharma* is the pursuit of morality, truth, and the ultimate philosophy of life itself, it is in fact an unending quest.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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