

## **DHARMO RAKSHATI RAKSHITAH: ETHICAL IMPERATIVES FOR INDIAN POLITICAL SOCIETY**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the ethical responsibilities and accountability within the realm of developmental politics, drawing insights from the novel *Dweepa: Island* by Kannada writer Na. D'Souza, with an English translation by Susheela Punitha. It illuminates the profound impact of governmental negligence on marginalized communities and highlights the disconnect between development agendas and the obligations of governing bodies. The central focus of the study is to uncover the consequences when political promises are unfulfilled and ethical duties are violated. It enumerates upholding 'dharma' as a measure to the political problematics, highlighting its timeless significance as a moral compass. The paper's significance lies in its relevance to contemporary global development politics, contributing to a deeper understanding of the ethical foundation of governance and fostering a broader discourse on ethics and accountability. The findings pave the way for a more responsible and equitable future in the realm of politics and development.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Accountability, Development Politics, Marginalized Communities, Governance, Dharma, Disaster, Nature

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## 1. Introduction

India is facing numerous challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, economic inequality, and the looming spectre of climate change necessitates a conscientious re-evaluation of its path towards progress. In the ongoing era of 'development-induced disaster' when the people in power are irresponsibly exploiting natural resources, it becomes pertinent to remember that sustainability requires a balance between economic, social, and environmental concerns. Sonam Wangchuk, an Indian engineer, educationist and a recipient of Magsaysay Award went on a 'Climate Fast' in January 2023. Wangchuk's aim was to raise awareness among Indian policymakers about the sensitive environment of Ladakh and advocate for its inclusion within the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. In his view, Ladakh's environment will become more susceptible to harm in the coming future due to indiscriminate industrialization and overpopulation (Wangchuk). Wangchuk represents the indigenous community of high-Himalayas who live on very frugal means relying on their natural atmosphere. If such places are developed in the spirit of plains, then a sudden influx of people from other parts of the country may disturb their ecosystem. One cannot ignore such apprehensions after witnessing cases of innumerable landslides and cracks in houses and commercial buildings in Joshimath a border town in Uttarakhand in January 2023. National newspapers and environmentalists attributed this panic-stricken situation to the National Thermal Power Corporation-NTPC's Tapovan Vishnugad Hydropower Project (Mishra).

What these two situations have in common is the role of the governing body and the political state of the country. Governing bodies entail special prerogatives and with it comes characteristic obligations. Each governance exemplifies both: the prerogatives and the obligations. In the root of all kinds of regulations with which all the governments abide by are manifested these obligations towards societal good. Peter Barton Hutt believes that executing regulation is the most difficult task that any government performs. In his opinion law and regulations are the "codifications of the ethical principles by which we have all agreed to live together in society" (Hutt 29). It is because of this ethical imperative that governments find it difficult to execute laws and regulations (Hutt 29). Whereas most of the accounts on the polity and governance struggle with the complexities of these

dialectics, the Indian epic *Mahabharata* sates very firmly:

धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ।

तस्माद् धर्मं न त्यजामि मा नो धर्मो हतोऽवधीत् ॥

(महाभारत, वनपर्व 313/128)

*Dharma eva hato hanti dharmao rakshati rakshitah*

*Tasmad dharma na tayjami ma no dharmo hatovadhith.*

The quote emphasizes the importance of upholding 'dharma', not in the strict association of the word with religion (Sahgal 227), but in its relation to righteousness, duty, and moral law. The philosophy of dharma suggests that by living a life guided by ethical principles and moral values, one can attain protection and security. It implies that dharma serves as a shield of protection for individuals and society as a whole. If the people in power do not perform their designated duty, it will harm everyone. This stems from the fact that a society devoid of ethical principles and steadfast integrity is likely to exhibit traits such as chaos, disarray and conflict.

The interplay between ethics and politics has been contemplated by many prominent thinkers and sages since antiquity. The central theme of Indian epics and mythologies, for example, revolves around the dialectics of *dharma* (righteousness) and *adharma* (wrongdoing), transcending the sphere of politics to encompass one's personal moral life. These epics have continued to shed light on the ethical conducts of individuals as well as communities since ages. Reference to texts like *The Mahabharata*, *The Ramayana*, *The Bhagavad Gita* and *The Arthashastra* underscore the ancient tradition of politics in India and give utmost importance to upholding *dharma*. These scriptures highlight the significance of performing selfless actions, cultivating detachment from outcomes, and steadfastly adhering to the principles of *dharma*. D.M. Prasad notes that Kautilya's philosophies on political ethics are "in conformity with the concept of *dharma*" (247). Kautilya propagated that the head of the state should stick to his intrinsic *dharma* (duties) for the betterment of the society at large (247). Indeed, these texts advocated the philosophy of *dharma* as the guiding principle for every facet of life. Significantly, ancient Indian scriptures laid the groundwork for ethical practices in politics well before similar concepts were contemplated in the Western world.

Contemporary era today needs environmental education and social change, reminding us of our responsibility to protect the planet and promote a harmonious coexistence between human society and the natural world. Literary texts like *The Overstory*, *Barren Island*, *Prodigal Summer* and *Dweepa: Island* explore the relationship between the islanders and their environment highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings. It warns us against the dangers of exploiting nature, indigenous communities, and the need for social justice. It suggests that *dharma* is not only essential for maintaining order and harmony in society but also to promote sustainable living. Indian mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik asserts that in the absence of effective laws, a society is susceptible to descending into anarchy and chaos, creating a scenario where the strong may exploit the weak. Laws and leaders, according to him, are essential to establish order, provide protection, and ensure mutual respect among people, embodying the fundamental concept of *dharma* (Pattanaik).

This collaborative research represents a modest endeavor to explore key dimensions of ethical responsibility and accountability within the sphere of developmental politics. Drawing insights from "Dweepa: Island" (2013) by Kannada writer Na. D'Souza, translated into English by Susheela Punitha, the study illuminates the profound impact of negligence on peripheral segments of society. It specifically examines the so called 'disconnect' existing between the development agendas and the obligations of responsible entities. The primary focus of the paper is to investigate the repercussions when political entities fail to uphold their promises, leading to breaches in ethical obligations. The research also explores the consequences, with a spotlight on the plight of indigenous and marginalized populations disproportionately affected by the inadequate performance of governing bodies. In practical terms, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ethical fabric of governance, emphasizing the interplay between promises and performances. It fosters a broader dialogue on ethics and accountability, paving the way for a more responsible and equitable future.

## **2. Damming the Rivers: Damning the Flow of Life**

*Dweepa: Island* is a fairly simple novella that depicts the impact of rising backwater and its consequences on human lives and relationships. The central focus of the story revolves around the

Linganamakki dam constructed on the Sharavathi River in the village of Hosamanehalli, encompassing five houses—three belonging to landowners and two to bonded labourers. While three families are slated to receive compensation, the families of the bonded labourers are unjustly denied any form of compensation. Among those received compensations, two affluent families bribe officials, securing land near Sagara for Parameshwarayya and land in Ananthapura for Herambha. Ganapayya's family, lacking funds to bribe officials, is left without any compensation—neither in the form of land nor money. This situation forces them to confront dire consequences entirely on their own, underscoring the challenges faced by those who cannot navigate the system through illicit means. The dam, along with the Sharavathi Hydro-electric Project housed within it, disrupts the natural flow of water, leading to the submergence of Sita Parvatha—a mythical hillock believed to have existed since the era of Rama and Sita. The submersion of the village due to the construction of the dam symbolizes a man-made threat to the Malnad region's long-held belief systems and values. It appears as a human-induced adversity, putting the livelihoods of the villagers at risk. Furthermore, it results in the forced displacement of island inhabitants who have a multi-generational history and maintain profound spiritual and cultural connections with the land.

The absence of compensation or alternative livelihood support from both the government and dam authorities leaves the displaced villagers in a state of economic and emotional distress, devoid of means to sustain themselves. Additionally, the dam's construction disrupts the natural balance of the island, leading to tiger invasions into human settlements. In addition to this ecological impact, sacred groves and revered trees are destroyed, disregarding the religious and cultural sentiments and beliefs of the islanders. The authorities' negligence in addressing the ecological and cultural impacts of the dam construction exposes the island's inhabitants to a multitude of problems, highlighting the dam authorities' lack of ethical considerations and empathy towards the natives and their natural and cultural heritage as depicted in the novel.

The text also portrays the tragic consequences of development-induced disasters accentuated by the heightened concern in recent times as ethics vanish from political decisions. It reckons the need to consider the broader implications of such unethical actions on the

natural world and on human society. The text becomes significant because of its contemporary relevance to the growing complexity of our times. Ganapayya expresses his concern about the adverse effects of modern advancements to Krishnayya:

This year the monsoon was not as good as it used to be . . . Malenadu was becoming barren with trees being cut to make way for railway tracks and highways, telegraphy lines and dams and townships for outsiders . . . if they continue to hack trees at this rate, of course, the rains will get scarce. And there won't be enough water in the Linganamakki Dam. The Sharavathi Project will be a waste. (D' Souza 76)

Throwing light upon unequally concentrated exploitation, David Bollier, in reference to the 2008 financial crisis, affirms that "growth is not something that is widely or equitably shared" (72). The tragedy befalls on "the poor, working class, and even the middle class (who) do not share much of the productivity gains, tax breaks, or equity appreciation that the wealthy enjoy" (72). As India continues to pursue economic growth and development, large infrastructure projects such as dams, highways, and industrial parks are displacing millions of people from their homes and livelihoods. Reckoning this loss, leading scholars of environmental issues, Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, write: "it has been estimated that in the last three decades, more than 11.5 million people have been displaced by development projects in India without being properly rehabilitated" (393). The human cost of these projects is often ignored in the name of progress and national interest, and the burden of displacement falls disproportionately on the poor and the marginalized. D'Souza recounting the pitiful condition of people due to the Sharavathi Valley Hydropower Project, raises a question that remains often ignored:

But who helped them cope with grief and fear, having uprooted themselves from everything familiar, from a way of life based on a value system they had known for generations? Nobody thought of that. On the other hand, crafty government officials exploited these people who were ignorant of the ways of the outside world. They sought bribes, they harassed and cheated them. (xii)

A development-induced disaster refers to a scenario in which development projects or activities, such as large-scale infrastructure construction, industrialization, urbanization, mining, and dam building, play a role in causing or worsening a disaster. This can occur either by introducing new risks or intensifying existing ones. In her

article "The Greater Common Good," Arundhati Roy expresses strong opposition to the construction of dams, particularly in the context of the Narmada Valley Project. She vehemently criticizes the notion of building dams under the pretext of facilitating easier access to water for irrigation, electricity production, and other environmentally detrimental choices. This disproportionately affects marginalized communities, like indigenous people and low-income households, who are often excluded from decision-making processes and lack access to resources to cope with or recover from disasters (Drydyk 105-113). Vandana Shiva, a global environmental activist, asserts that capitalist conglomerates represent the "1% with one mechanical mind," effectively running "*singular money machine*". According to Shiva (65), these conglomerates are accountable for the extensive degradation of both nature and humanity. Though less in number, these highly powerful moneybags wield control over governments worldwide, exploiting natural resources unethically and driving the common man into poverty and homelessness. D'Souza's active participation in the Sharavathi River Valley Project exposed him to bureaucratic apathy (xxv), providing a firsthand account of the profound impact of the dam on the unfortunate and marginalized villagers. His personal experience and emotional engagement render "Dweepa: Island" a credible source for examining the ethical dimensions of politics in praxis.

### 3. Governance and *Dharma*: An Ethical Imperative

Abraham Lincoln's well-known declaration about the modern democratic nation - "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" - suggests that the authority exercised by the government does not originate inherently from the government itself. Instead, it is entrusted by and derived from the community of people that it serves. Therefore, those wielding this entrusted power must be accountable to the public for their actions, and they must use their authority for the benefit of the community rather than for personal gains. D'Souza portrays the exploitation of the common man, as illustrated by the events at Parameshwarayya's areca farm, exposing the unethical utilization one's hard work for political gains:

It was six months since his areca farm had been razed to the ground. Some minister was visiting some place in Sagara and so all the areca

palms on his land were chopped off and taken away to decorate the place (20).

Immanuel Kant, a prominent German Enlightenment thinker, promotes the fusion of ethics and politics as a powerful strategy to tackle the intricate issues in society. In his opinion, "true politics cannot take a single step without first paying homage to morals, and while politics itself is a difficult art, its combination with morals is no art at all" (Kant 125). His assertion aligns with the complexities hinted at in the opening sections of this paper. The challenge arises from the observation that legislative decisions are often swayed more by political ideologies, economic factors, and societal values than by ethical principles. While not consistently the primary driving force behind policy choices, these elements undeniably exert a significant influence on shaping political perspectives and practices. Moreover, such decisions wield authority in defining and regulating the relationship between the public and the state. Alan Tapper highlights this view: "In a representative democracy, political office is a form of trusteeship and trusteeship is an ethical concept with specific implications ... Politicians make decisions on behalf of the community" (Tapper 178). He advocates for the pivotal role of ethics in politics, emphasizing the need to uphold ideals such as "the national interest, the public interest, the common good, justice, liberty, and protecting the vulnerable" (178). State representatives bear the responsibility of acting as trustees for their community, making decisions that align with ethical ideals. Even when pursuing other objectives like economic development or environmental protection, it is crucial for politicians to evaluate their actions within an ethical framework to ensure the promotion of societal well-being.

Ethical values emanate from the inherent 'rights' belonging to all human beings, and any violation of these rights signifies a disregard for age-old ethical principles. According to Paul Warner, these values "appeal to one's sense of virtue and duty... and thus introduce a concern for justice into one's deliberations" (214). This premise that ethical principles are fundamental to ensuring justice becomes particularly significant when considering the dispossessed and marginalized. The ethical challenges become more pronounced when economic and political interests clash with concerns related to ecological sustainability and indigenous lifestyle. The narrative of the Sharavati river in Karnataka, as recounted by Dweepa, exemplifies



this. The construction of a dam on the Sharavati river in 1964 under the Sharavathi River Valley Project by the Karnataka State Government had profound impacts on the lives of the impoverished and marginalized villagers in the Shivamogga district. The project involved building dams, reservoirs, and power stations, disrupting the local ecology and the livelihoods of the region's poor and marginalized residents. The Administrative indifference resulted in insufficient environmental assessments and mitigation plans that could have minimized the project's impact on the environment. The lack of proper oversight and monitoring by authorities further heightened the risk of ecological damage. This scenario unveils the ethical imperative of considering the rights and well-being of marginalized communities when making political decisions that involve significant environmental and social consequences.

Journalist Soumya Chatterjee reported that on 10 September 2020, the Karnataka High Court had to issue notices to the state government and other agencies while hearing the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed against the survey and geotechnical investigation regarding the construction of dam. The project violated "multiple environmental laws and posed an imminent threat to the endangered Lion-tailed Macaque" (Chatterjee). It has been found in research that the construction of dams is one of the "most damaging human activities in river basins, deeply modifying the physiography of watershed" (Schmutz and Moog). In addition to its broad scientific impact, one of the principal effects of the project on the lives of the poor and marginalized is the loss of land and livelihoods. In the novel, the decision to evacuate Hosamanehalli due to a flood prompts Duggajja to express a heartfelt desire to remain, as the thought of moving makes him feel "weak in the legs ... he loved his piece of land with the attachment a woman feels for her mother's house" (12). His sentiments reveal the profound connection between human emotions and their native land, reflecting personal history and identity.

According to Robinson, "for millions of people around the world, development has cost them their homes, their livelihoods, their health, and even their very lives" (1). The construction of dams and reservoirs results in the displacement of thousands who depend on farming and fishing for their sustenance. The absence of adequate compensation and rehabilitation exacerbates the situation, subjecting affected communities to immense hardships. W. Courtland Robinson

observes that victims of natural disasters and conflicts often receive more attention and aid than those displaced due to development projects, despite the fact that the consequences of development-induced displacement can be equally severe, if not more so (1). When authorities neglect their ethical responsibilities, the repercussions extend beyond physical displacement, encompassing the loss of livelihoods, cultural identity, and social connections. The plight of the displaced communities in the narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the ethical dimensions inherent in developmental decisions that affect the lives of the most vulnerable.

Another facet of the adverse impact resulting from the unethical execution of construction projects is the absence of compensation or support, exemplified by Ganapayya's sense of despair when he expresses, "The government has set out to ruin thousands of homes. Is it a big deal for it to drown my village, my home? But what about the compensation they say they'll give us? When will that come?" (D'Souza 3). The author later starkly portrays the harsh reality: "They get no compensation" (3). This callousness toward those displaced by development projects is a recurring theme in government projects.

Governments and corporations often provide financial compensation or alternative housing that, in reality, only serves as a nominal gesture compensating for the loss of land, livelihood, and cultural identity. Displaced individuals struggle to access new economic opportunities and often find themselves compelled to work in lower-paying jobs with diminished job security. Moreover, they endure significant social disintegration, uprooted from their communities and compelled to adapt to a new way of life. Furthermore, the construction of dams and reservoirs results in the loss of forests, diminishing the availability of fuelwood and other forest produce that the poor depend on for their daily needs. The disruption of traditional land-use practices also affects the availability of grazing land for their livestock. Whether viewed through an ecological or sociological lens, "the high incidence of water logging and the wholesale submergence of forests and wildlife have been presented as examples of the unacceptable costs of dam building" (Gadgil 393).

These well evident repercussions of ethically failed governing system cast doubt on the seamless integration of ethics with politics.

According to Robert N. Bellah, politics is often used as a tool for individuals to achieve their desired outcomes through improper influence, dubious methods, and even covert forms of bribery. He goes on to speculate that given these tendencies, it might be asserted that "politics is not ethical" (Bellah 59). This becomes quite evident in the novel when answering Nagveni's queries regarding the uncertain deluge, her husband Ganapayya, responds cynically: "Not this year, perhaps ... But how can we be absolutely sure it won't? What guarantee is there in what the government says?" (D'Souza 31). This reflects the stark reality where the authorities entrusted with the welfare of society fail to fulfill their duty. David Bollier, addressing the challenges posed by ethical lapses in climate change, inequality, infrastructure, and democratic accountability, remarks: "As distrust in the state grows, a very pertinent question is where political sovereignty and legitimacy will migrate in the future" (73). This highlights the growing skepticism about the effectiveness of traditional political institutions in upholding ethical standards, prompting a reevaluation of the standards for political authority and legitimacy within the administrative system.

#### **4. Development Ethics: Dialectics of Promise and Performance**

There are certain universally recognized traits, such as the promotion of transparency and accountability, ensuring fairness and justice, fostering trust and confidence, encouraging citizen participation etc., that play a crucial role in emphasizing the significance of ethical imperatives in politics. Embracing the dictum "*Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitath*," these traits ensure the protection of the vulnerable and powerless by preventing unfair treatment and enabling marginalized sections of society to safeguard themselves from unjust practices. The novel highlights the corrupt aspect of governance as we observe the Submersion Office peon neglecting his *dharma* as a public servant, repeatedly visiting the affluent Herambha Hegde's residence for personal gain. In contrast, the impoverished Ganapayya makes numerous visits to the Submersion Office, yet his problem remains unresolved (1-3). Upon each visit to the office, he confronts deceptive assurances that flooding will not occur: "Nothing of that sort will happen . . . You can stay on peacefully until we compensate you with land elsewhere" (D' Souza 2). They lacked a reliable source to turn to for accurate information. The people who are responsible for

Ganapayya's welfare are reduced to corrupt means, causing village-folks to lose faith in the political system of the state.

Ganapayya's character serves as a symbol for the impoverished and marginalized individuals who are disproportionately affected in times of disaster. Wealthy and influential figures like Parameshwarayya and Herambha Hegde are the first to reap the benefits promised by the government, thanks to their willingness to engage in corruption. When Herambha suggests to Ganapayya that he should bribe the office, stating, "they'll speed up work on your file if you bribe them some five or ten rupees" (10), it underscores the disparity. While the affluent receive swift compensation for their losses, Ganapayya, on the other hand, is informed by the surveyor that his file is missing (5).

The ethical principles of impartiality and equality aim to ensure that every citizen is treated fairly and equitably, irrespective of their social status, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics. This commitment to *dharma* fosters social justice and diminishes discrimination and inequality in society. Unfortunately, in reality, indigenous people bear the brunt of suffering repeatedly, as an unseen boundary perpetuates disparities among different societal strata. This discrepancy dictates how individuals are treated within the community, with those possessing financial resources often receiving preferential treatment over those leading a humble, nature-oriented life. These indigenous individuals, who strive to live virtuously in harmony with nature, find themselves disrupted by corrupt officials who neglect their true duty, their *dharma*.

In an era dominated by scientific advancements, it should be readily acceptable for people to acknowledge that a nature-centric, ethically driven lifestyle is more sustainable than a money-centric, anthropocentric approach. This alignment is evident in science, acknowledging the ethical implications long appreciated by indigenous populations and embracing faith-based worldviews that advocate for essential diversity as a cornerstone for a meaningful and collective future (Gear 69). However, as illustrated in *Dweepa*, native people find themselves culturally uprooted from their existence, forced to bear the consequences of ecocultural disruption resulting from others' mistakes. Again, as the water level rises, we see that the boundary between wildlife and human habitation falters. A water snake enters Ganapayya and Nagveni's house, and later, a tiger kills

Ganapayya. These incidents metaphorically depict nature's counterattack on humanity, seeking retribution for the atrocities inflicted upon Mother Nature. Furthermore, they highlight the dire state of politics in the country, where the needy are often left to fend for themselves. Promises made to the poor and marginalized sections of society are frequently unkept, and these individuals bear the brunt, often paying the ultimate price with their lives.

## 5. Conclusion

The Indian political society, with its rich legacy of *dharmā*, serves as a poignant reminder that a recommitment to ethical foundations can nurture a political society characterized by inclusivity, equity, and ecological responsibility. Consequently, the imperative for the Indian political society becomes evident: to respond to the call of *dharmā* in every policy, decision, and action. It's a call to promote social justice, reduce inequality, and safeguard the rights of all, especially the marginalized and vulnerable. It recognizes the fact that the true costs of environmental degradation and social injustice are borne by the most fragile threads in our societal fabric. The mantra of '*Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah*' enjoins us to remember that development must not be a juggernaut that crushes both our environment and our humanity. Instead, it should be a force for common good, measured not just in GDP growth but in terms of well-being and dignity promised to every citizen. In the novel, the government's promises of development clash with the realities of the Hosamanehalli's ecosystem and the livelihoods of its inhabitants. These promises describe ethical imperatives since the government is obliged to improve the standard of living for its citizens. However, on the other hand, the implementation of these promises often leads to the destruction of the island's natural resources, displacing its inhabitants, and disrupting their traditional way of life.

The dynamics between promise and performance hinges on the broader issue of development that prioritizes economic growth over social and environmental justice, and perpetuates inequality and injustice in the name of progress. Development-induced disaster not only harms people's livelihoods and cultures, but also creates a deeper sense of alienation and dislocation that affects their sense of self and identity. It throws light on the fact that the government's promises of progress are often made without fully considering the practical

realities of the land and its inhabitants. It thus becomes pertinent to remember that development achieved at the cost of the environment and its people will not sustain for long. While economic growth and development are important for improving living standards and reducing poverty, they must be pursued in a way that does not harm the environment or violate human rights. With a primary focus on this objective, the United Nations Member States embraced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. This agenda outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing pressing concerns in an era marked by rapid ecological degradation. As per the UN adoption of SDGs, it is important to “recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests” (UN, SDGs). Even a cursory analysis of construction of dams through the lens of SDGs enables us to perceive the potential threat to several of these Goals (6, 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16) resulting in environmental degradation.

Constructing dams has a detrimental impact on water quality and availability. The overall development-promoting process associated with dams is highly unsustainable, impeding the carbon storage capacity of ecosystems and adversely affecting the ecology of rivers, lakes, and other aquatic environments. Terrestrial ecosystems and habitats, including riparian zones, undergo significant destruction due to dams. Finally, dams infringe upon the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, violating the human rights of innocent individuals under the pretext of promoting growth. These dimensions of dam politics unveil the interconnectedness of development and ecological disaster. To ensure the sustainability of dam construction, it is imperative to address the environmental repercussions of such initiatives. Sustainable development requires long-term planning with holistic approach that takes into account social, economic, and environmental aspects of progress. Development that disregards the well-being of the environment and its inhabitants is inherently unsustainable and is destined to result in catastrophic consequences. The solution to these problematics takes us back to an ethical approach rooted in our *dharma*. As expressed by Bellah, "if we genuinely desire a democratic society, ethical politics is not discretionary – it is a mandatory requirement" (Bellah 60).

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