

DHARMA WHISPERS AS THE WORLD REELS

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No man who wears the ‘helmet of hope’ walks unsteady, even when the ground shakes. Across the corridors of human history, as empires rose and fell and certainties gave way to chaos, humanity did not survive by power or progress alone. It endured by returning to something deeper — a way of living that binds us to truth, nurtures compassion and guides us through uncertainty. That way is named in Indian soil as ‘*Dharma*’. It is not merely a rulebook or a religious idea. It is the sacred rhythm that underlies all life - the principle that connects the individual with the cosmos, self-interest with collective good and action with inner integrity. In times of darkness, it has not only been the inner voice of *Dharma* that kept the world from falling apart, but those who lived it with courage and clarity. These lives didn’t command attention from thrones or towers - they moved hearts, awakened conscience and reminded the world that harmony, justice and selflessness are not abstract ideals but practical and powerful paths to renewal. Even today, as we stand amid the storm of hyper-connectivity, moral confusion and fragmented identities, *Dharma* remains - not as an echo from a distant past, but as an amplifying voice to our moral conscience. It does not ask us to retreat into nostalgia or rigidity, but to rise with resilience, to act with empathy and to live with a sense of responsibility that embraces the whole. In this sense, *Dharma* is not just India’s gift to the world — it is a collective moral inheritance for all who seek meaning beyond the self and hope beyond the noise. It is the living fruit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* - the vision that the whole world is one family.

Rooted deeply in the spiritual and philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent, *Dharma* has often been translated as duty, righteousness, moral order or cosmic law. However, such translations only begin to hint at its depth. *Dharma* is not merely a concept, nor just a philosophical abstraction. It is a profound ‘way

of being', a harmonious dance between self and society, between the individual and the cosmos. It is an ever-evolving moral fabric that sustains life, relationships and the universe itself.

At Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, this living tradition of *Dharma* has found fertile ground. *Dharma* is the fulcrum around which all the missions and ministries of Dharmaram College rotate and are guided – thanks to the visionaries and luminaries who built this institution as an Indian platform to incarnate Christian principles and ethos within the rich soil of eastern spiritual thought, particularly through the glimpses of divine surplus (*daivī sampatti*) and spiritual integration. The Carmelite fathers - the torchbearers of this vision - breathed this wisdom into classrooms, corridors and publications, most notably through the *Journal of Dharma* which now marks fifty years of prophetic scholarship. In this moment of significant achievement, we pause to honour the pioneers of Dharmaram's *Dharma* mission – those who demonstrated that ancient wisdom can be continually reimagined without losing its soul.

In the first editorial of the *Journal of Dharma's* inaugural volume, Professors Francis Vineeth and J.B. Chethimattam wrote: It is expected that the *Journal of Dharma* will fill the gap of a felt need in the contemporary society of mankind ... Moreover, there is a growing consciousness that we are living under a common threat of physical, moral and even spiritual cataclysm ... In this common situation of recognized need for a dialogue among world religions, *Journal of Dharma* undertakes the task of reflecting on *dharma*, the religious condition of man, in an inter-religious and international perspective. (Vadakethala & Chethimattam, p. 4)

Indeed, fifty years later, we witness the fulfilment of that vision-alive and expanding with renewed conviction and a deeper sense of mission.

The legacy of *Dharma* lies in its remarkable adaptability to evolve across ages and contexts. From the battlefield of Kurukshetra in the *Mahābhārata*, where Arjuna grappled with the ethical dilemma of war, to the Buddha's compassionate reframing of *Dhamma* as a path of liberation grounded in mindfulness and ethical conduct, *Dharma* has taken diverse yet harmonious forms.

From the Ashokan edicts of benevolent governance to Mahatma Gandhi’s ethic of *Satyagraha* (truth-force), *Dharma* has continually inspired individuals and civilizations to uphold justice, pursue truth and promote the welfare of all beings. What keeps *Dharma* profoundly relevant today is its relational dynamism and ethical sensitivity. Unlike rigid legalistic codes, *Dharma* responds to context. The duties of a father, teacher or ruler differ because their responsibilities arise from distinct relationships and roles. In moments of crisis, even the gods are portrayed as transcending conventional norms to uphold a higher good. Such flexibility is not moral relativism, but an ethically attuned discernment—sensitive to time (*kāla*), place (*deśa*) and the interconnectedness of all forms of life.

As the *Mahābhārata* declares: “*Dhāraṇāt dharma ity āhuḥ, dharmo dhārayate prajāḥ*” / धारणात् धर्म इत्याहुः धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः. That which upholds and sustains the people is called *Dharma*; it protects and nourishes all beings (*Kaṇva Parva* 69.58). *Dharma*, then, is not a fixed dogma but a living principle of discernment (*viveka*), responsibility (*kartavya*), and relational awareness (*sambandha-vijñānam*). It is responsive, resilient and grounded in the commitment to the common good—even when that requires reordering moral priorities. The *Dharma* of a monk is not the *Dharma* of a king, but both serve the deeper purpose of sustaining life, justice and harmony.

Dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ/धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः *Dharma* protects those who uphold it (*Manusmṛti* 8.15). The sacred legacy of *Dharma* is not a relic of the past, but a living force, ever vibrant and visible in the fabric of contemporary society. It is the sacred axis around which the universe maintains its rhythm. When the world falters, it is *Dharma* that endures, standing firm like a mountain amid collapsing clouds. The ancient Indian sages did not confine *Dharma* to personal morality or religious obligation. They envisioned it as the very architecture of existence—a cosmic blueprint that harmonizes the self, society and the universe. This foundational order, known as *rta*, was the primordial harmony from which *Dharma* emerged and gradually matured. From the hymns of the *Vedas* and the meditations of the *Upaniṣads* to the

ethical vision of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the liberative teachings of the Buddha and Mahavira, *Dharma* has evolved as a dynamic, adaptive and unifying principle - ever responsive to the changing currents of time and life.

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu nirāmayāḥ/सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः। May all be happy; May all be free from illness; May all behold what is auspicious; May none suffer (*Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.14). In our time, *Dharma* does not call us to retreat into the comfort of nostalgia – it challenges us to engage in moral creativity. It urges us to ask bold questions: Can business be reshaped through the medium of ethical stewardship rather than profit alone? Can politics rediscover its vocation in truth rather than populism? Can we, as citizens of a common planet, extend our sense of duty beyond anthropocentrism - toward animals, rivers, forests and future generations? As we swim against the currents of the 21st century, facing climate crisis, social inequity, technological alienation and moral ambiguity, the legacy of *Dharma* offers not a rigid code but a compass. It reminds us that compassion, duty and truth are not competing values, but foundational pillars of a just and sustainable civilization. Let us then not merely commemorate the legacy of *Dharma*, but consciously embody it – in our thoughts, our words, our choices and our collective vision for the future. For, within *Dharma* lies not only the soul of our past but the seed of a more luminous and prosperous future. It is in this spirit of remembrance and renewal that we enter into the Fiftieth Anniversary of our *International Quarterly, Journal of Dharma*. As Dharmaram continues to serve as a sanctuary of righteousness and reflection, may the light of *Dharma* shine ever brighter – illuminating our path toward a more compassionate, equitable and united world.

In the article titled “Religion and *Dharma* in the Twenty-First Century: Decoding the Trends of Research in the *Journal of Dharma*,” Bibhudatta Dash, Priyanka Jinde and G. Lakshmi Narasimham present a comprehensive bibliometric study of the *Journal of Dharma* in the twenty-first century, aiming to uncover contemporary research trends and emerging themes. As a pioneering platform for scholarly engagement in religious and

philosophical studies since its inception in 1975, the Journal, according to the authors, continues to address global challenges underscoring its *dharmic* commitment to rigorous and transformative inquiry. The second article, “Dance as *Dharmic* Exercise: The Spiritual Benefits of Classical Dance” by Xincong Leng, explores classical dance not merely as an artistic performance but as a sacred, embodied expression of *dharma*—capable of fostering inner healing and spiritual awakening. In “*Karuṇā* as *Dharma* Legacy: Buddhist Compassion in Contemporary Moral Consciousness,” Ramala Sarma reflects on the enduring influence of Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) as a *dharmic* force for universal moral awakening, emphasizing peace, non-violence and ethical responsibility.

In “Ethical Sportsmanship: Competitive Sports Within the Framework of *Dharma*”, Rui Xue interrogates the ethical tensions of modern sports from a *Dharmic* background. Drawing insights from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the article foregrounds concepts such as *swadharma* (personal duty), *yuddha dharma* (righteous competition) and *karma yoga* (selfless action) as guiding principles for cultivating integrity and spiritual growth in athletic endeavors. Fu Yek Ming, Lee Kean Yew and Ching Thing Ho in their article “Bringing *Sādhāraṇadharma* to the Educational Endeavours: A Case Study of Than Hsiang Temple in Malaysia investigate the role of *sādhāraṇadharma* (common *dharma*) in fostering holistic human development through life education. By integrating ethics, character, emotional intelligence and spirituality, the authors illustrate how Than Hsiang Temple embodies and transmits Buddhist values within a pluralistic modern society. In “Digital *Dharma*: Navigating the Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Technological Innovation in Art and Creative Expression,” Puja Mishra and Ashutosh Mishra examine how the logic of *dharma* from Indic traditions can guide the evolving nexus between technology and art. They propose “digital *dharma*” as a paradigm that transcends both *technophilia* and *technophobia*, advocating for an ethically grounded and spiritually enriched model of creative innovation. The final article, “The Loss of Autonomy Under Top-Level Institutional Constraints: A Study on the Buddhist

Ecosystem in Kaifeng City Under the Buddhist Management Policies of the Ming Dynasty” by Lichang Chen, critically analyzes the erosion of grassroots religious vitality under Ming-era religious policies. The study asserts that the departure from *dharmic* legacy in Kaifeng—particularly the replacement of community participation with elite patronage—serves as a powerful reminder that when *dharma* is severed from collective ethical engagement, religious institutions may endure structurally but lose their soul, weakening their moral and spiritual resonance within society.

As the *Bhagavad Gītā* reminds us: *Śreyān svadharmaḥ viguṇaḥ paradharmaḥ svanuṣṭhitāt. Svadharmaḥ nidhanaṁ śreyāḥ paradharmaḥ bhayāvahaḥ* श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः॥ It is better to follow one’s own *dharma*, flawed though it may be, than to tread perfectly in the footsteps of another. To die fulfilling one’s own *dharma* is noble; to live by another’s is perilous and full of fear (*Bhagavad Gītā* 3.35). This is the call before us: to discern our unique *Dharma* and walk it with courage, integrity and compassion. In remembering and reclaiming *Dharma* today, we do not merely preserve an ancient legacy. We animate a living wisdom, a dynamic moral compass that speaks to the challenges of our time — with clarity, depth and grace. Let us then become carriers of this sacred order — in thought, word and action — so that when the world stumbles, *Dharma* will indeed stand, through us.

References

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