RELIGION AND *DHARMA* IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: DECODING THE TRENDS OF RESEARCH IN THE *JOURNAL OF DHARMA*

BIBHUDATTA DASH, PRIYANKA J. & G.L. NARASIMHAM⬧

Abstract: The *Journal of Dharma*, since its inception in 1975, has been a pioneering platform for scholarly research in religious and philosophical studies. Taking into account its legacy in Religion and Dharma, this paper presents a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the *Journal of Dharma* in the twenty-first century, aiming to elucidate contemporary trends and emerging themes. This study employs a dual methodological approach: performative analysis and science mapping. Performative analysis offers insights into the journal's impact and influence, while science mapping visualizes the interconnections between different research themes and disciplines. By decoding these trends, this research reveals the interdisciplinary nature of the journal, highlighting its role in addressing pressing global and contemporary issues through religious and philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: *Bibliometric Analysis, Religion, Journal of Dharma, VOSviewer, RStudio, Web of Science.*

1. Introduction

Religion and *dharma* have been a part of human civilization for

⬧ Bibhudatta Dash is Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur (India). Email ID: bibhudattadash@hss.vnit.ac.in

⬧ Priyanka Jinde is a Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur (India). Email ID: priyanka.jinde26@gmail.com

⬧ G. Lakshmi Narasimham is a Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur (India). Email ID: narasimham1996@gmail.com

ages. Historically, religious institutions exercised significant power, shaping art, literature, governance, and social norms. The concept of *dharma* is the fundamental aspect of religion, which encapsulates moral law combined with spiritual discipline, guiding individuals in ethical living and societal duties. These principles are evident in the historical development of various cultures, where religious teachings have influenced legal systems, social structures, and individual behaviours (Dash, et.al., 2025). In contemporary research, the role of religion and *dharma* continues to evolve, with scholars exploring their relevance to modern ethical and social issues. For instance, Hindu environmental ethics emphasize the interconnectedness of all life forms and the duty to protect nature, aligning with contemporary ecological movements (Dwivedi, 2021 and Dash et.al., 2024). The emphasis of Christian doctrines on morality, focusing on virtues such as love, compassion, and justice, guides adherents towards ethical behaviour and social responsibility (Dumitrascu, 2020). Similarly, Buddhist principles of compassion promote modern humanitarian efforts and peace-building initiatives (Lai, 1981). Islamic teachings emphasize moral virtues such as justice and charity guiding Muslims to engage in social welfare, and community support (Narithookil, 2005; Hedayetullah, 1996). Sikhism believes in "the transcendence of man from self-centeredness to God centeredness and the identification of his finite consciousness with the cosmic consciousness" (Bala 2001, 525). According to Jainism, the concept of ahimsa "is the very criterion and norm of spirituality and religiosity" (Sekhar 2001, 47). All other religions, like Judaism, Zoroastrianism, etc, also believe in and promote universal peace (Greenspan, 1996; Suresh, 2000; Zeplowitz, 1997; Manickam, 1992). Thus, the concept of *Dharma*, which acts as a common thread among all religions, has led us to probe deeper into this intersectionality to understand its place in the realm of religion in the twenty-first century.

The interdisciplinary nature of religious studies has led to the emergence of numerous academic journals. Among these, the *Journal of Dharma*, started in 1975, stands out as a pioneering publication, fostering scholarly dialogue on the multifaceted

impact of Religion and *Dharma* on society. Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram publishes the *Journal of Dharma*. The founding Editors of this journal were Fr. Francis Vineeth Vadakethala and Fr. John Britto Chethimattam. The present Editor-in-Chief of the journal is Dr. Mathew Attumkal. With an aim to investigate and foster the interface of 'Religion and Philosophy' along with other academic disciplines this journal provides a platform for diverse academic contributions that intersect theology (Chemparathy, 1981; Nicholas, 2004; Karuvelil, 2010), philosophy (Williams, 2015; Chackalackal, 2009; Mariadas, 2017), environmental science (Malayil, 2014; Xiang & Li, 2021), and social ethics (Nandhikkara, 2013; Ancheta, 2013; Tsai, 2023), reflecting the broad scope and depth of contemporary religious studies. The *Journal of Dharma* not only publishes cutting-edge research but also encourages interdisciplinary collaboration, advancing an understanding of how religious and dharmic principles can address global challenges. Currently, this journal is indexed in many of the major databases like 'Scopus' and 'Web of Science.'

This paper conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the *Journal of Dharma*, covering publications of the last two decades (2004-2024). It aims to trace the development in the fields of 'Religion' and '*Dharma*' while addressing the following questions: What is the total number of publications in the last twenty years in the *Journal of Dharma*? What kind of documents are published in the journal? Who are the major researchers, institutions, and countries that are contributing to the journal? What are the emerging trends in the fields of 'Religion' and '*Dharma'* reflected through the publications in the *Journal of Dharma* in the last twenty years?

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative methodology that finds its origin in the twentieth century. It was introduced in 1969 by Alan Pritchard, who defined it as "the application of mathematical and statistical methods to book and other means of communication." Earlier the data collection and bibliometric analysis was done manually but with the development of 'Science Citation Index' (SCI) by Eugene Garfield in 1964 this field gained prominence due to the incorporation of sophisticated algorithms

and databases that facilitated the analysis of citation patterns, authorship networks, and research trends making it convenient to analyze the scientific data. In contemporary times, bibliometric analysis has become integral to research evaluation, influencing funding decisions, academic rankings, and policy-making, while also providing insights into the dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination across various disciplines.

Bibliometric analysis is used in analyzing various research areas like religion (Dwivedi et.al., 2024), literature (Thirumangalam, 1976; Anand & Singh, 2019), geography (Nandhikkara & Chethimattam, 1975 and Dash et.al., 2024), medicine (Prakash, 1996; Anyanwu, 1999), economics (Puen, 2021), arts (Sahi, 2020; Nandhikkara, 2015), linguistics (Basu, 1992), etc. for systematic literature review.

2. Data And Methods

The metadata taken for the study was obtained from the Web of Science database in July 2024. The primary reason for choosing the Web of Science was to prevent data duplication, as highlighted by Strozzi et al. (2017). We have taken the data from the last twenty years (11 documents were included from the year 2024). '*Journal of Dharma*' was the key term used to search by using the filter 'publication titles', where 703 documents that included all kinds of publications were identified. The various document types include articles, book reviews, editorial material, biographical items, record reviews and review articles. The analysis utilized various filters available in the Web of Science database, like 'publication years,' 'document types,' 'researcher profiles,' 'affiliations,' and 'countries/regions.' The data analysis was done in two ways: performance analysis and science mapping analysis. Performance analysis was carried out to evaluate various scientific entities like countries, affiliations, authors, etc. by quantifying their productivity and the impact of their scientific output (Cobo et.al., 2011) while science mapping analysis focused on demonstrating the structural and dynamic patterns of scientific research (Börner et al., 2003). The dataset comprising 703 documents from Web of Science was then exported to Excel for

further examination. The freely accessible software VOSviewer (www.vosviewer.com) was employed to analyse and visualize connections among authors, keywords, and countries. Using the VOS clustering method, topics were categorized into distinct groups, with each cluster displayed in a unique colour. A thorough interpretation of the visualizations is presented in the results section, where keywords are depicted as circles. Generally, the interpretation is as follows: the circle size and label font indicate the number of occurrences, the colours represent clusters, and the proximity of circles shows their relatedness and similarity. Additionally, the free software RStudio (https://posit.co/download/rstudio-desktop/) was used to analyse publication trends in the *Journal of Dharma*.
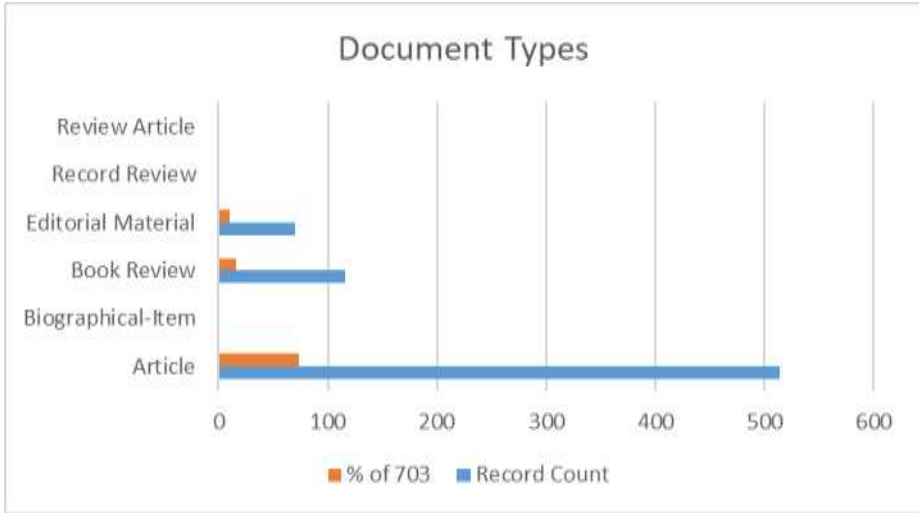
3. Discussion and Results
Document Types
The bibliometric analysis was conducted on the 'document types' published in the *Journal of Dharma* from the year 2004 to 2024 as shown in Fig. 1. Five 'document types' were found to be published in this journal from the total of 703 documents out of which 514 are articles, 116 are book reviews, 70 are editorial material; while Biographical item, record review, review article are found to be 1 each as shown in Table 1. Among the various documents - articles, book reviews and editorial materials are found to be popular as they comprise of 99.573% of the total document types.

Table 1
Document Types

Document Types	Record Count	% of 703
Article	514	73.115
Biographical-Item	1	0.142
Book Review	116	16.501
Editorial Material	70	9.957
Record Review	1	0.142
Review Article	1	0.142

Source: WoS

Figure 1: Document types and Number of Publications

Most Influential Authors
The analysis of 703 publications, authored by 538 different individuals, reveals that Jose Nandhikkara is the most prolific author with 53 papers published between 2005 and 2023 (as shown in Fig. 2). His peak productivity years in terms of the number of publications were 2012 (6 papers), 2013 (5 papers), and 2014 (5 papers), while 2021 was his most productive year in terms of total citations per year, averaging 2.5 citations. Table 2 illustrates the top 20 authors with the highest number of publications, highlighting Saju Chackalackal (28 papers), Maheshvari Naidu (12 papers), Paulachan Kochappilly (10 papers), and V. F. Vineeth (8 papers) as the leading contributors. Figure 3 identifies the most productive years for these authors.

Table 2
Top 20 Most Productive Researchers

Researcher Profiles	Record Count	% of 703
Nandhikkara, Jose	53	7.539
Chackalackal, Saju	28	3.982
Naidu, Maheshvari	12	1.706

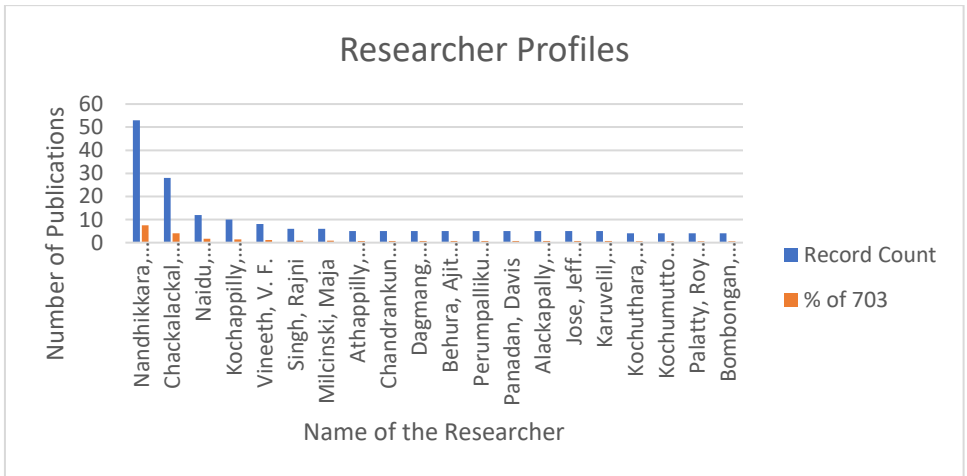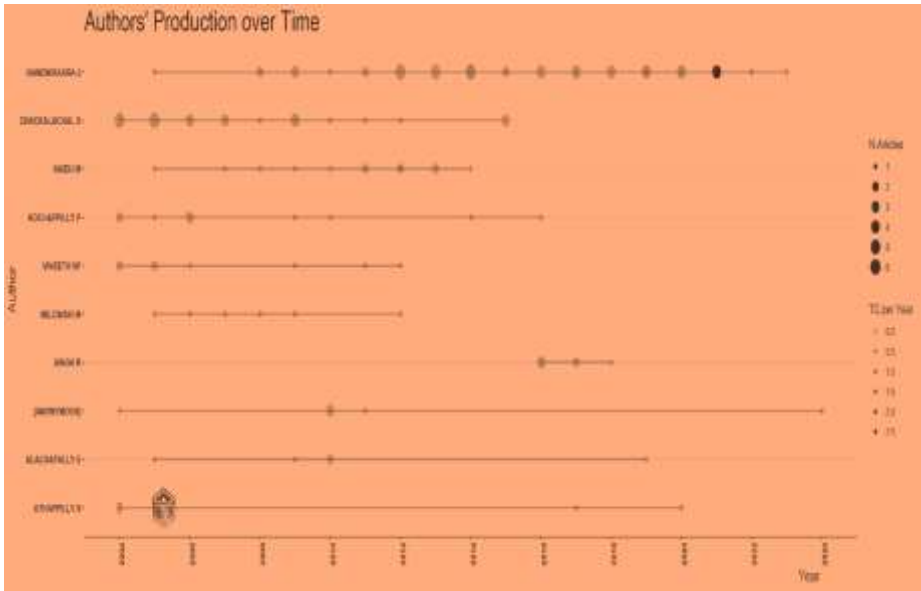|		
Kochappilly, Paulachan	10	1.422
Vineeth, V. F.	8	1.137
Singh, Rajni	6	0.853
Milcinski, Maja	6	0.853
Athappilly, Sebastian	5	0.711
Chandrankunnel, Mathew	5	0.711
Dagmang, Ferdinand D.	5	0.711
Behura, Ajit Kumar	5	0.711
Perumpallikunnel, K.	5	0.711
Panadan, Davis	5	0.711
Alackapally, Sebastian	5	0.711
Jose Jeff, Shawn	5	0.711
Karuvelil, George	5	0.711
Kochuthara, Shaji George	4	0.568
Kochumuttom, Thomas	4	0.568
Palatty, Roy Varghese	4	0.568
Bombongan, Dominador	4	0.568

Source: WoS

Figure 2: Most Influential Authors

Figure 3: The Most Productive Years of the Authors

Most Influential Countries

A total of 39 countries have contributed to the *Journal of Dharma*, among which this research focuses on the top 20 influential countries based on the number of publications in the given time period, which is taken for the study. According to the analysis India stands with the highest number of publications (n= 290) contributing 41.252% of the total publications, followed by China (n=32) with 4.552%, South Korea (n=32) with 4.552%, USA (n=31) with 4.41% and Philippines (n=27) with 3.841% are the top five countries that have contributed to the *Journal of Dharma* (shown in Table 3). RStudio is the software program used to visually represent the countries with most scientific production as shown in Figure 4. The darker the colour density, the greater the influence of that country.

Table 3

Top 20 Most Influential Countries

Countries/Regions	Record Count	% of 703
India	290	41.252
China	32	4.552

South Korea	32	4.552
USA	31	4.41
Philippines	27	3.841
South Africa	21	2.987
England	13	1.849
Nigeria	13	1.849
Malaysia	11	1.565
Belgium	8	1.138
Canada	8	1.138
Germany	8	1.138
Japan	7	0.996
Taiwan	6	0.853
Slovenia	4	0.569
Switzerland	4	0.569
Australia	3	0.427
Kenya	3	0.427
Romania	3	0.427
Indonesia	2	0.284

Source: WoS

Country Scientific Production

Figure 4: Countries with the Most Scientific Production
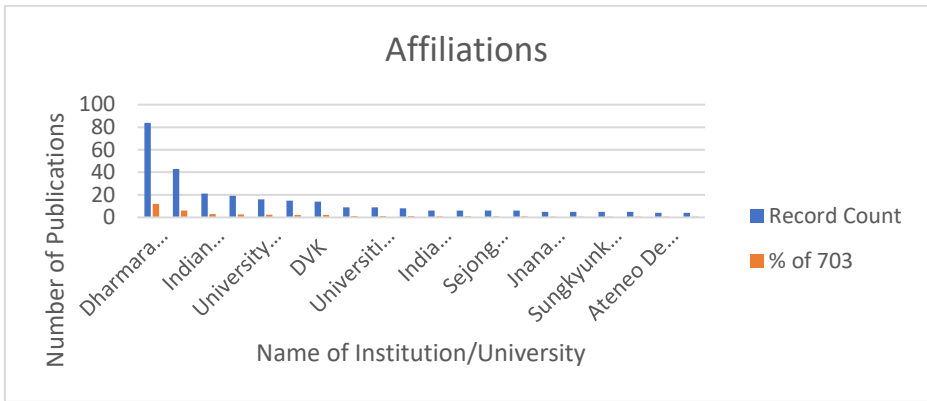
Most Influential Institutions
A total of 349 institutes have contributed to the *Journal of Dharma*.

Figure 5 and Table 4 provides the top 20 institutions based on the number of contributions they make. Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (n=84), Christ University (n= 43), IIT System (n=21), De La Salle University (n=19), University of Kwazulu Natal (n=16), Indian Institute of Technology Indian School of Mines Dhanbad (n=15), DVK (n=14), Konkuk University (n=9), Universiti Malaya (n=9), Delta State University (n=8) are the top ten institutions respectively.

Table 4: Top 20 Institutes

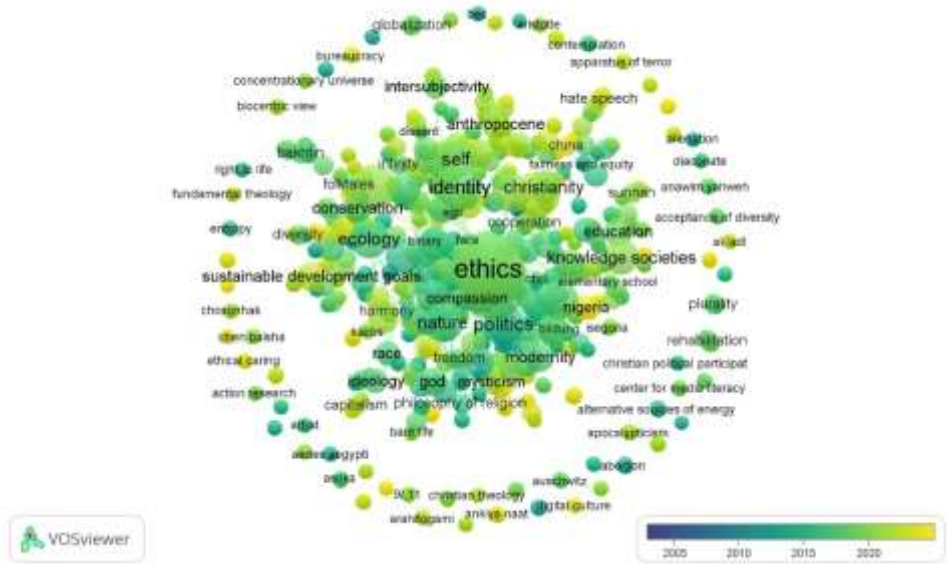| Affiliations	Record Count	% of 703
Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram	84	11.948
Christ University	43	6.116
Indian Institute of Technology System IIT System	21	2.987
De La Salle University	19	2.702
University of Kwazulu Natal	16	2.276
Indian Institute of Technology Indian School of Mines Dhanbad	15	2.134
DVK	14	1.991
Konkuk University	9	1.28
Universiti Malaya	9	1.28
Delta State University	8	1.138
India University	6	0.853
National Institute of Technology NIT System	6	0.853
Sejong University	6	0.853
Shandong Normal University	6	0.853
Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth	5	0.711
St Josephs College	5	0.711
Sungkyunkwan University Skku	5	0.711
Universite Catholique Louvain	5	0.711
Ateneo De Manila University	4	0.569
Boston College	4	0.569

Source: Wos

Figure 5: Shows the top 20 institutes based on the number of publications in the *Journal of Dharma*

Keyword Analysis

The analysis and visualization of the terms that appeared in the 'full fields and citations' in the *Journal of Dharma* using the software VOSviewer provides three kinds of visualization of maps. In the types of analysis, 'co-occurrence' was selected, and in the unit of analysis, 'author keywords' was taken; 'full counting' was opted for, in the counting method. The minimum number of occurrences of a keyword was kept at 1, where all 1588 keywords met the threshold.

The total strength of 'co-occurrence links' with other keywords was calculated for each of the 1588 keywords. Keywords with the greatest 'total link strength' were selected, revealing that the largest set of connected items consists of 1174 items, forming 46 different clusters. The first cluster had a maximum link strength of 53 items. The analysis results are shown in Figure 6 through 'network visualization.' The circles are proportionate to reflect the frequency of terms and citation occurrences from the *Journal of Dharma*. The larger circles represent higher occurrences of terms. The distance between circles reflects how closely related the terms are, where shorter distances indicate stronger connections. This relatedness is assessed by counting how often terms appear together in the titles and abstracts (Rodrigues et al., 2014). Different clusters are distinguished by various colours. Figure 8 shows that 414 items do not have any link strength with each

other. 'Density visualization' in VOSviewer highlights term occurrence and relatedness in the *Journal of Dharma*, using colour gradients to show term density, with warmer colours indicating higher occurrence and stronger networks (see Fig. 7).

Figure 6: The network visualization of author keywords, showing the link strength

Figure 7: The density visualization of author keywords

Figure 8: Overlay visualization showing the emergence of all the keywords over time, including the unlinked keywords in the *Journal of Dharma*

The 'overlay visualization' (shown in Fig. 8) of author keywords provides an understanding of how scholarly interests and thematic focuses have evolved in the study of Religion and *Dharma* over time. In the early twenty-first century, terms such as religious pluralism, history, interreligious dialogue, asrama, church music, and Indian religions were emerging, indicating a growing scholarly interest in understanding the diversity of religious expressions, historical contexts, and interfaith interactions. This trend reflects a broader academic and societal movement towards recognizing and appreciating religious diversity, fostering interreligious dialogue, and examining the historical developments that shape contemporary religious landscapes. The prominence of terms like asrama and church music suggests an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating sociocultural, historical, and artistic perspectives into the study of religion.

In more recent years, keywords like ancient Japan, sustainable society, eco aesthetics, eco ethics, essential religious

practices, co-existence ethics, public order, morality, bioethics principle, Sufism, and animism have emerged, signifying a shift towards integrating environmental, ethical, and bioethical considerations within religious studies. This shift highlights the increasing recognition of the interconnectedness between religion, ethics, and ecology, as well as a deeper exploration of indigenous religious practices such as Sufism and animism. The continuous prominence of terms such as ethics (Attumkal, 2024, 48(04)), dialogue, identity, self, knowledge, societies, Advaita, Hinduism, sustainable development, ecocriticism, and anthropocentrism underscores their foundational role in the broader discourse of Religion and *Dharma*. These enduring terms that indicate the ongoing scholarly engagement with ethical considerations, identity formation, and sustainable development reflect their persistent relevance in understanding religious and philosophical thoughts.

Analyzing the evolution of these keywords is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into shifting scholarly priorities and the emergence of new research areas within the field of Religious and *Dharma* Studies. Secondly, understanding these trends helps in contextualizing contemporary religious and ethical issues within a broader historical and cultural framework. This contextualization is essential for developing informed and nuanced perspectives on current debates and challenges related to religion, ethics, and sustainability.

Conclusion

The *Journal of Dharma* stands out as a pivotal academic platform that facilitates the exploration and dissemination of scholarly work across a wide spectrum of religious traditions, philosophies, and interdisciplinary areas related to religion. This research reveals the journal's commitment to fostering interreligious dialogue. The journal promotes a comprehensive and inclusive academic discourse by publishing articles that span various religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and other indigenous and new religious movements.

The thematic diversity of the journal is equally noteworthy.

It encompasses a broad array of topics, including theology, philosophy, ethics, spirituality (Attumkal, 2024, 49 (01)), cultural studies, and contemporary issues like ecology, social justice, gender and human rights (Attumkal, 2024, 48(03)). This thematic inclusivity ensures that the journal remains relevant to current global challenges while staying grounded in the foundational tenets of religious studies.

This research highlights the journal's role in bridging the gap between tradition and modernity, offering critical insights into how ancient religious principles can address modern societal issues. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of the journal encourages the integration of perspectives from fields such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and environmental studies, enriching the academic conversation.

By analyzing publication and citation trends, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the research landscape within the *Journal of Dharma*, which aims to help scholars understand the journal's influence and key areas of focus, thereby expanding the journal's visibility and readership. The citation analysis done in this research identifies the most influential articles and authors, recognizing seminal works in the field of Religion and *Dharma*, while keyword analysis reveals how research themes have evolved over time, focusing on the emerging areas of interest. Additionally, by highlighting research gaps and under-explored areas, this study encourages scholars to explore new topics in Religion and *Dharma*.

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