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CORPORATE CONSCIENCE AND ETHICAL IMAGINATION: *PAÑCATANTRA* WISDOM IN AN ERA OF CORPORATE POLARIZATION

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Abstract: Corporate polarization denotes the fragmentation of corporate values from both ideological and ethical perspectives. Today, we witness that corporate organizations are standing at a moral crossroads. The gap has been widening between corporate rhetoric and actions, clearly witnessed in the conflicting and inconsistent ethical positions, ethical indifference, and their focus on performative Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This study attempts to answer two interrelated questions centered on

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the reawakening of corporate conscience: How can *Dhārmic* reasoning revive corporate conscience? & Can folklore nurture dissent and moral imagination in the context of governance? The study explores the theories of Arendt's moral conscience (thinking as resistance), Sen's idea of justice (ethical public reasoning), and Gandhi's *Satyāgraha* (truth-based dissent). Further, the study considers how the *Pañcatantra* offers ways to navigate complex ethical terrains through its wisdom tales, which are not only abstract moral idealism but also advocate pragmatic ethics (Chakraborty, 1995; Banerjee, 2021). The discussion brings out the alignment of *Pañcatantra* stories with the appropriate SDGs (SDG 8, 12, and 16), instrumental in handling corporate crises. The study also attempts to introduce a few cases at both the national and international levels to anchor the morals of the *Pañcatantra* within the corporate ecosystem. The study recommends the value-added course for both academicians and professionals to gain insights into the significance of *Dharma* and *karma*.

Keywords: *Corporate Conscience, Corporate Polarization, Ethico-Political Imagination, Pañcatantra, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*.

1. Introduction

Corporate Polarization is a term that has received attention in the domain of ethical management literature. This concept evolved from the outcomes of two popular theories of Milton Friedman and R. Edward Freeman (Banerjee, 2021; Kaptein, 2019). The term denotes the ideological as well as ethical fragmentation of corporate values in the face of profit maximization, wealth maximization, competitive advantages, and political unrest. In the twenty-first century, the corporate world stands at a moral crossroads. The rapid pace of transformation, the deepening rate of technological penetration, and the steady flow of global funds into the system have considerably strengthened business development. However, it has also raised questions about the solidity of corporate governance, corporate culture, and the value system (Crane & Matten, 2016). The gap between corporate

rhetoric and ethical reality has widened. It has been evidenced by moral fatigue, performative Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and ideological fragmentation.

2. Polarization of Values in the Corporate World

The term corporate polarization refers to the growing divide in moral and ideological commitments within organizations, between leaders, employees, and the broader community (Kaptein,2019). The subordination of corporate ethics to competing ideologies is truly manifested in corporate Polarization. Few organizations are profit centers, and few follow the philosophy of the Friedman Shareholder Theory of 1970. This ideological fracture fuels ethical inconsistency, as it exhibits the oscillation of corporate identity between moral signaling and stakeholder value maximization. Moral fatigue is a condition in which employees, stakeholders, and leaders relinquish their moral principles due to a loss of emotional and ethical energy to act conscientiously (Moore, 2015). The paradoxical corporate conscience is that the celebration of pomp and grandeur in the mission statement is being marginalized in reality by the actionable governance. Although a few organizations claim that their sustainability plans are well-aligned with the SDGs, a closer examination of performance-based CSR reveals a different observation. As stated by Banerjee (2021), CSR under neo-liberalism has been "colonized by market rationalities," resulting in a discourse of non-accountable virtue and diverting corporate philanthropy into mere artificial image management.

When the corporate ecosystem attempts to equate financial performance with ethical values and moral clarity, it gets jeopardized (Crane et al., 2019). Ethical dilemmas are faced by organizational leaders who are victims of moral paralysis, as coined by Kaptein (2019) in his literature work. A corporate code of conduct that lacks moral conviction and fails to bring in ethical imagination, instead emphasizing behavioral regulation (Treviño & Nelson, 2021). With the gradual onset of moral paralysis resulting from sheer managerial disinclination, an individual loses their authority and appears to be decontrolled. Moral responsibilities are often compromised in corporate ethics. Conscientious performance triggers the movement of the inner

moral compass, which transcends regulatory compliance and reengages the *Dhārmic* idea coupled with duty and integrity (Chakraborty, 1995).

3. *Pañcatantra* and SDGs: Complementary Ethical Compasses

In the era of corporate Polarization, it is the need of the hour to awaken the ethical imagination in the fragmented periphery of the organization, to envision corporate life as an arena of moral agency. The complementary ethical framework, namely *Pañcatantra* and UNSDGs, can reawaken corporate glory. Rajan, in his 2006 composition, stated that readers of the *Pañcatantra* stories can easily comprehend intricacies through prudence (*Nīti*), truth (*Satya*), and the collective good (*Sāmānya Dharma*) (Rajan, 2006). The translation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to SDGs was pertinent to rectify the inefficiencies of the former. Therefore, SDGs are more grounded in the principles of universality, inclusivity, and partnership. The SDGs, as a whole, constitute a global framework for corporate and social responsibility. The SDGs translate conscience into measurable goals, including the elimination of poverty (SDG 1), ensuring decent and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8), promoting responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and building peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16) (United Nations, 2015). The strength of the collaborative efforts between *Pañcatantra* and SDG lies in connecting inner ethical reflection with external accountability. The world of data is igniting the wheels of automated progress, but it is also posing challenges to ethical sustainability. In this juncture, the *Pañcatantra* and the SDGs can create a revival of corporate conscience by integrating the essence of *Dharma*.

4. Key Questions for Ethical Reimagination

The study attempts to answer two interrelated questions centered on the reawakening of corporate conscience.

A. How can *Dhārmic* reasoning revive corporate conscience? The corporation must consider the philosophical question of *Dharma* in the age of data. Algorithms and incentives dominate the modern world, but it needs the adoption of *Dhārmic* reasoning, which involves following moral stewardship, subduing the

burning demand for sole profit-making, and prioritizing long-term reputation-building.

B. Can folklore nurture dissent and moral imagination in the context of governance? The study put forward an argument that the traditional narratives of *Pañcatantra* work beyond idealism as its narratives are tightly linked to the strategic ethics, political diplomacy, to motivate individuals to blow the whistle fearlessly against the odds for a survival-centric governance. Thus, the objective of this article is to articulate an ethico-political imagination for corporate responsibility that is rooted in *Pañcatantra* wisdom as well as SDG ethics. We try our level best to make a more constructive, critical and interdisciplinary analysis of the corporate crisis beyond moral interpretation by thematically mapping the tales of *Pañcatantra* with suitable cases, its governance reports and appropriate SDGs.

5. *Dharma*, Conscience and Prophetic Dissent

In the era of corporate polarization, *Dharma* stands as the antithesis to ideological fragmentation and moral fatigue. Beyond religious doctrines, Dharma provides a self-regulating ethical framework consisting of a tripartite structure of universal moral principles, contextual duties, and institutional responsibility. universal values viz., *satya* (truthfulness), *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *nyāya* (justice) foster moral clarity by mitigating the malice and the harm corporate roles and profit goals cause in the society. These values are independent of roles and specific preferences (Glucklich, A., 2002; Doniger, 2009). Contextual duties (*svadharma*) acknowledge that individual obligations are relative to one's roles, responsibilities, and capabilities.

In the polarized corporate era, *svadharma* is not about compliance but rather about upholding the universal values within one's specific roles. Corporate entities like rulers/institutions must protect justice, guard the vulnerable, and regulate their own authority for the common good (Olivelle, 2016). The crisis of corporate polarization is primarily due to the abandonment of Institutional responsibility (*rājadharma*) in favor of profit maximization (*artha)*.

5.1 Arendt's Moral Conscience: Thinking as Resistance

The essence of Hannah Arendt's concept of banality of evil posits that systemic moral failure arises not from malice but from thoughtlessness. Thinking is an active process where one's own assumptions are challenged, and consistency between one's values and actual behavior is ensured. Internal conversation is necessary to fulfill one's *svadharma*. Systemic evil is resisted by conscience. In the corporate context, commitment to thinking becomes an act of political resistance. When internal moral dialogue is prioritized by the individual, it establishes a sphere where institutions cannot completely eradicate thinking. This speaks about the individual's *svadharma* in the face of institutionalized ethical compromise.

5.2 Sen's Idea of Justice: Ethical Public Reasoning

Sen's realization-focused approach states that justice emerges through an inclusive and open process of deliberation or ethical public reasoning (Sen, 2009). The corporate *rājadharma* (institutional responsibility) is not simply about following the established rules or laws. It is about being held accountable through this moral practice. In a polarized corporate setting, adopting Sen's capability approach, which prioritizes capability over wealth, would be beneficial. Here, human well-being is assessed by the substantive freedoms people have to lead meaningful lives and not by their wealth (Sen, 1985, 1999). Further, Sen (2006) contends that consensus is not necessary for a just society. Injustices like hunger, gender inequality or political exclusion need to be addressed on priority. Collective, continuous and moral reasoning of people create moral power and that is Sen's idea of justice. He suggests ethical courage as a requisite to promote pluralistic dialogue that prioritizes the clearing of injustices. This ensures that the corporate entity fulfills its *rājadharma*.

5.3 Gandhi's *Satyāgraha*: Truth-based Dissent

It is a moral and political practice that blends truth, kindness, and ethical action (Gandhi, 1927). Unwavering commitment to truth in the face of injustice (*satya*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), and moral

courage culminate in *Satyāgraha* (Gandhi, 1951). Truth-based dissent provides a conceptual tool to leaders and employees to deal with corporate polarization. Acceptance of pain and suffering and upholding the conscience are the ways to resist coercion (Gandhi, 1951). In present times, whistle-blowing can be termed as an act of organizational *Satyāgraha*. It is not an act of betrayal but rather an act of upholding organizational Dharma. This dissent requires enormous moral courage to accept the personal costs and to uphold one's conscience to resist the coercion. Gandhi's Satyagraha model will help us achieve social justice, political change, and moral transformation rather than coercion (Dalton, 2012). In essence, it helps to awaken the opponent's conscience through truthful resistance and achieve moral transformation.

5.4 Ethical Courage as a Leadership Virtue and Corporate Morality

When we analyze the ideologies of Arendt, Sen, and Gandhi, we see that it is fundamentally ethical courage that bridges the gap between philosophical responsibility and corporate morality. It is a philosophical and practical mechanism that translates abstract principles of *dharma* into actionable corporate morality. Independent judgment, truthfulness, ethical nonconformity, and recognition are recognized across polarization. These elements are directly applicable to leadership practice. Moral courage is of utmost importance in the case of organizations, where leaders must not succumb to groupthink, but rather they should promote and protect spaces for independent thinking (Arendt, 1971). Ethical courage must go beyond symbolic consultation and involve genuine stakeholder thinking and in pluralistic dialogue (Sen, 2009). Ethical leadership is crucial for resisting pressures, maintaining truthful public reasoning, and protecting dissent in polarized environments. Such leadership supports moral change, fairness, and justice, and builds corporate morality in polarized environments.

Moral values, fairness and public reasoning foster responsibility and guide the actions of corporations in polarized environments. Value-based businesses find it easier to meet CSR

and ESG expectations, demonstrating greater ESG honesty and alignment. Carroll's CSR pyramid maps closely onto these roots: ethical duties indicate virtue and conscience; legal responsibilities echo fairness and the rule of law; philanthropic or transformative duties mirror compassion and the common good; and economic obligations reflect stewardship. However, the frameworks and principles given by Arendt, Sen, and Gandhi help us move from compliance-driven CSR to responsibility-based practice. The current ESG frameworks prioritize only metrics. Hence, there is a need to transition to adopt virtues as discussed by Arendt, Sen, and Gandhi to achieve authentic justice.

6. *Pañcatantra* as Moral Pedagogy for Corporate Conscience

Pañcatantra was composed by Vishnu Sharma between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE. It was designed as a pedagogical manual for the young princess who wished to instill *Rājadharma* (duty of rulers) and *Buddhi-nīti* (wisdom-based policy) (Olivelle, 1997; Sharma, 2019). *Pañcatantra*, a collection of wisdom tales, strengthens the minds of readers with moral dignity, benevolence, and a deep sense of integrity.

6.1 Levels of *Pañcatantra*

Pañcatantra offers a way to navigate complex ethical terrains through its wisdom tales, which are not only abstract moral idealism but also advocate pragmatic ethics (Chakraborty, 1995; Banerjee, 2021). Interpreting with these views, the three key sections of *Pañcatantra*, *Mitra-lābha* (Gaining friends), *Mitra-bheda*(Losing friends), and *Aparīkṣitakārakam* (Considered actions) are exhibited, and they emerge as profound allegories for ethical leadership, prudent governance, moral intelligence, and collaborative performance in the corporate world (Gupta, 2014).

(i) ***Mitra-lābha*** (Gaining Friends) - Ethical collaboration and relational leadership: The first book of the *Pañcatantra*, titled *Mitra-lābha*, is based on the principles of friendship, loyalty, and cooperation. The tales, namely: "Lion and the Bull", "*Piṅgalikā*", and "*Sañjīvika*", demonstrate the power of alliance, mutual respect, and shared goals (Olivelle, 1997). Corporations need to instill a genuine sense of inclusivity, transparency, and

collaborative decision-making, in addition to financial growth (Chakraborty, 1995). The stories from *Mitra-lābha* remind today's leaders to extend beyond the 5 Ps and strengthen cohesiveness in the organization's performance and functioning. Organizations must adopt the lessons from these fables, as characterized by the Lion, which recognized the contribution of the Bull. Moreover, organizations can assess the value of human capital (Banerjee, 2021) and can improve their stakeholder partnership, strategic alliances, and governance. Today, leaders need to be informal and non-authoritative, sharing stewardship. The pedagogy of *Mitra-lābha* aims to nurture relational intelligence, binding together moral values before they become depleted. In today's scenario, alliance of the entity can be retained not only through ethical loyalty but also through mutual benefits and strategic collaboration. *Mitra-lābha* emphasizes the need for strategic alliances, interdependent survival beyond moral friendship.

(ii) ***Mitra-bheda*** (Losing Friends) - Ethics of Loyalty and Perils of Manipulation: The collection of five books in the *Pañcatantra* offers a bundle of values, moral justice, and societal awareness. The second book of the *Pañcatantra* is *Mitra-bheda* , which highlights in its collection of stories how friendship is eroded due to non-cooperation, envy, selfishness, and duplicity. Exposure of organizations to vulnerability is due to the absence of ethics, transparency, and firmness in policy-making and governance (Sen, 2008). Corporations are often perceived as having lost their coherence, integrity, and morality due to their weak discernment, ineffectiveness, and inefficiencies in their endeavors. The mistrust and lack of bonding slowed the rate of growth of the organizations. The tale of the character Damanaka raised confusion and disbelief between the Lion and the Bull, and this is truly exemplified in the corporate world (Olivelle, 1997). Corporate leaders need to foster a sense of belonging among their employees to restore lost peace, harmony, and balance (Gupta, 2014). Today, corporate scandals highlight the corrosive practices within organizations. The uncontrolled practice of capitalism, nepotism, adulteration, manipulative decision-making, favoritism, and political scheming has revealed the fragmentation of corporate values and unmasked the loss of vital governance

and transparency (Gupta, 2014). The loss of friendship between *Piṅgalikā* and *Sañjīvika*, a tale from *Pañcatantra* symbolizes the loss of moral coherence in the organization. Thus, *Mirtabhed* teaches the leaders of the organization to focus on virtuous acts to control the boardroom influence, strategic dissent and adversities in reputation building. It emphasizes on the aspects of miscommunication, political instability, and narrative manipulation beyond loss of friends.

(iii) ***Aparīkṣitakārakam*** (Ill-considered Action) - Prudence, foresight, and responsible decision-making: The fifth book of the *Pañcatantra*, *Aparīkṣitakārakam,*

is built on the fundamentals of prudence, presence of mind, and strategic intelligence. The ignorance-driven loyalty and blindfolded approaches of followers towards their leaders not only undermine obedience and dignity but also expose the perils of erratic actions (Rangarajan, 2010). Visiting the *Pañcatantra* collections provides an opportunity to absorb wisdom that can be instrumental in one's future life. Just as in *Pañcatantra*, a foolish monkey tried to save his master from the irritable actions of a small creature, but finally ended up demonstrating the fatuous performance of killing his king due to non-strategic action plans.

The tales of *Pañcatantra*, emanating from *Aparīkṣitakārakam* , connect the modern fragility of corporations in the agile era to the unplanned, unsound, and unsafe decisions made by human capital (Olivelle, 1997). *Pañcatantra* awakens *viveka* (discriminative wisdom)- a balance between decisiveness and reflection. It is beneficial to be virtuous, but overextending oneself without discernment can lead to detrimental vices (Shastri, 2016). Learning the lessons would benefit in handling decision making in crisis situations, would reduce uncertainties in governance and enhance the accountability in leadership. *Aparīkṣitakārakam*, as a *tantra*, shows the strategic ways to navigate the uncertainties, unanticipated outcomes, and judgmental limitations.

6.2 Ethico-Political Imagination: *Pañcatantra's* Legacy for Corporate Awareness

Pañcatantra tales closely intertwine the two concepts of ethics and strategy to facilitate the spectacular emergence of *dhārmic*

leadership, promoting coherence between reflective decision-making and strategic action plans (Chakraborty, 1995; Sen, 2008). It is the need of the hour to learn from *Pañcatantra* the restructuring of 5Ps: power, profit, position, politics, and publicity, within institutional constraints, by embedding the attributes of prudence, loyalty, virtue, and value. The leadership can be sustainable not only with the attributes of the 5 Ps but also with decision-making, moral value system, and truthful counsel, which will also make an impact on the corporate ethics and ESG governance (Olivelle, 2006). Today, the literature of *Pañcatantra* is a point of intersection between moral values and strategic necessities. Where ethics is not depicted solely as an absolute idealism but as a pragmatic situation.

7. SDGs as Frameworks of Modern *Dharma*

Today, *dharma* in modern times is viewed by many scholars as ethical principles emerging from the robust framework of SDGs. *Dharma*, a core concept in Indian philosophy, guides principles of moral duty, justice, and responsible stewardship that the SDGs incorporate in addressing challenges such as decent work, responsible consumption, and peaceful institutions. The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) act as a global framework that represents ethical principles recognized by many scholars as the modern expressions of *dharma*. *Dharma* is valued as a core concept in the context of Indian philosophy, which guides principles of moral duty, justice, and responsible stewardship that the SDGs incorporate in addressing challenges such as decent work, responsible consumption, and peaceful institutions.

Table 1: Alignment of *Pañcatantra* Tenets with Contemporary SDG Mandates

***Pañcatantra* Ethical Tenet**	**Core Moral Principle**	**Alignment with SDG Target**	**Dhārmic Underpinning**
Avoiding Avarice and Greed	Restraint in acquisition and consumption	SDG 12.2: Efficient use of natural resources; SDG 12.3: Halving waste	*Aparigraha* (Non-possession); *Ahiṃsā* (Non-injury)

Sagacity and Prudent Strategy	Ethical decision-making in governance and resource allocation	SDG 16.6: Developing effective, accountable institutions	*Nyāya* (Justice); *Buddhi* (Intellect)
Value of Trust and Loyalty	Reliability in relationships and contracts; stakeholder fidelity	SDG 8.9: Protecting labor rights and safe environments	*Satya* (Truthfulness); *Karuṇā* (Compassion)

Table 2: Mapping Core *Dhārmic* Principles to Specific SDG Targets

***Dhārmic* Principle**	**SDG Focus Area**	**Illustrative SDG Target**	**Philosophical Connection**
Lokasangraha (Common Good)	Holistic Global Welfare (SDG 17)	Partnerships for the Goals: prioritizing the welfare of the weakest	Collective responsibility extending beyond self-interest and borders.
Artha (Righteous Livelihood)	Economic Justice (SDG 8)	SDG 8.5: Equal pay for work of equal value; end child labor	Ethical wealth creation, ensuring means are honest, and benefits are distributed righteously.
Ahiṃsā (Nonviolence)	Environmental Stewardship (SDG 12)	SDG 12.2: Sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources	Minimizing injury to all living beings and ecosystems; compassionate coexistence.
Satya (Truthfulness)	Institutional Integrity (SDG 16)	SDG 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery; transparent institutions	Mandates honesty, transparency, and integrity in governance and commerce.
Nyāya (Justice)	Rule of Law (SDG 16)	SDG 16.3: Promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice	Maintaining social and legal equilibrium, guided by *Dharma* to ensure fairness for all.

The SDGs have restructured their framework to fulfill their ethical commitments, as depicted in Mishra's 2023 literature work. Mishra (2023) presents a *dharma* Framework for Decision-Making

and Governance, viewing SDGs as more than economic goals; they call for an ethics-driven approach that connects community well-being, ecological balance, and social justice. This perspective invites us to view the SDGs as a contemporary manifestation of *dharma*, uniting global action around moral responsibility (Mishra, 2023).

Recent literature highlights how SDGs can go beyond technical targets set to represent shared ethical commitments. A *dharma* Framework for Decision-Making and Governance, proposed by Mishra (2023), perceives the SDGs as more than economic goals. It altogether calls for an ethics-driven approach that can help connect the constructs of community well-being, ecological balance, and social justice. The *dhārmic* ideas of fair and dignified labor strongly resonate in the context of SDG 8, which represents decent work and economic growth. It is reported that workplace justice and equity should not be viewed as mere regulatory requirements. The principle of *niṣkāma karma*, which represents the practice of selfless action for the collective good, is closely linked with the ethical imperatives. This alignment is also supported by the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Pañcatantra*, which view work as a duty that promotes social harmony and individual dignity (Kumari, 2025; Deepak et al., 2025). At the same time, the *dhārmic* value of moderation and ecological stewardship is being reflected in SDG 12, which represents responsible production and consumption. For example, scholars like Deepak and colleagues (2025) advocate for ancient Indian wisdom. The *Pañcatantra*, as well as the concept of yajna (sacrifice), warns against the overconsumption and reiterates the importance of adhering to the natural limits. The responsible use of resources today depicts the future balance and long-term sustainability (Deepak et al., 2025).

SDG 16, which represents the concepts of peace, justice, and strong institutions, relates closely to *dharma's* emphasis on just governance and social order. In the study by Dagmang (2021), it is highlighted how these ethical traditions enhance institutional integrity and social inclusion, aligning with the *Pañcatantra*'s teachings on wise leadership and transparency. This theoretical lens helps in understanding SDG 16 as a call to reinforce *dhārmic*

social harmony through accountable institutions (Dagmang, 2021). The calls for balance, justice, and wise decision-making in these fables enrich our understanding of how ancient traditions can inform global development efforts today (Deepak et al., 2025; Kumari, 2025). All these calls for balance, justice, and wise decision-making in these fables enrich our understanding of how these ancient traditions can assist in global development efforts today (Deepak et al., 2025; Kumari, 2025).

Table 3: Nexus Between *Pañcatantra* Lessons and SDGs

***Pañcatantra* Value**	**SDG Target**	**Academic Source**	**Explanation**
Interconnectedness	SDG 12	Deepak et al., 2025	Emphasizes balance and ecological care
Fairness and equity	SDG 8, SDG 16	Kumari,2025 & Dagmang, 2021	Advocates for workplace justice and accountable institutions
Wise governance	SDG 16	Mishra, 2023	Highlights responsible and transparent leadership

Literature also stands critical in the context of superficial CSR and greenwashing as forms of ethical populism that fail to afford the depth of *dharma*. For example, Sadineni (2024) warns that such instrumental approaches risk misleading stakeholders and undermining actual social and ecological progress. It is said that the authentic responsibility must be grounded in a sincere moral commitment that reflects the *dhārmic* ideal of *yogakshema,* which embodies the welfare of all beings across time (Sadineni, 2024). On a whole, *Pañcatantra*, an abode of spiritual knowledge when anchored with a specific UNSDG framework, curbs the corporate chaotic disequilibrium by evoking the moral conscience of the leaders.

8. Corporate Dissent and Crisis Management

Corporate *dharma* in today's world has lost its visionary power due to endless operational inefficiencies, strategic failures, and the indulgence of unscrupulous behavior; therefore, a reawakening of corporate conscience is becoming a top priority for leaders.

Pañcatantra places its utmost trust in guiding the corporation to shape its future path with the tenets of truth, justice, honesty, and integrity (Sharma, 2002). Ethical storytelling can cripple the interdisciplinary moves with spiritual awareness. Signs of mismanagement become glaring when corporate claims deviate from their real intentions. The *Pañcatantra* offers its moral values to the community at large, enabling them to judiciously evaluate their actions and implement the proper measures by exercising their intrinsic judgment, prudence, and integrity. Unproductive innocence torments the ability to reach the target. From the lessons of the *Pañcatantra* story "The Monkey and the Crocodile", corporations can learn to maintain loyalty and friendship by using presence of mind to overcome adversity instead of surrendering to the vices of deceptive nudges (Sharma, 2002).

8.1. Case-based Insights

a. Infosys and Ethical Governance: Infosys is well-known for its strong corporate culture, led by founder N. R. Narayan Murthy. The essence of leadership is substantiated by uprightness even in a company's most critical situations. Governance policy was firm and fair, which resonates with one of the famous *Pañcatantra* tales, namely "The King and the Wise Minister. Through these relatable narratives, it can be learned that one should nurture reasonableness while standing at the moral crossroads, and in a corporate context, leaders need to demonstrate their charismatic power of making the right decisions at the right moment. "This allegory hits the governance ethos of Infosys, which firmly aligns with the actions of the wise minister. The company institutionalized the ethical dissent of employees and auditors, who function as wise ministers exercising the right to question, advise, and prevent impulsive and unethical decisions. Infosys proved that governance should be self-corrective and not reactive. Infosys's ESG report 2024-25 emphasizes transparency, whistleblower policy, ethics in auditing, stakeholders' accountability, and integrity through the C life values of the company. This report highlights the governance oversight, carbon neutrality, independent ethics system, and responsible leadership as needed for a competitive and sustainable growth (Infosys,

2025). The ESG governance report can be connected with the principles of *Pañcatantra*, special mention of principle of prudence (*Nīti*) as appears in the case of *Mitrabheda* (Loss of friends)

b. Tata's Sustainability Ethos: The company Tata is known for its humanity and value system, prioritizing values above commercial motives. The leadership is more participatory rather than authoritarian (Tata, 2021). When global markets forced cost-cutting, and COVID-19 hit the economy, the consequences became more severe. However, the company continued its best practice of prioritizing long-term relational values over short-term gains. The story of "The Dove, the Mouse, the Crow, the Tortoise, and the Deer," from the second book, *Mitra-lābha*, recounts how a dove and its flock, trapped under a hunter's net, escaped by flying together under the king's command. A mouse gnawed the net and freed them, but they later befriended a deer, a tortoise, and a crow. Crisis united all these friends, and they survived with collaborative support. Tata's philosophy of compassion and moral responsibility has always guided not only the employees but also the community, the environment, and, obviously, the organization as a whole, as reflected in the company's sustainability and governance reports. The reports portray a true religious and philosophical leadership as demonstrated in accountability and social responsibility (Tata Sustainability Group 2025)

c. Global Counterexamples: Enron's bankruptcy is due to imprudence and disloyalty. On the other hand, Volkswagen's emission scandal proved the power of collective silence and non-transparency driven by malfunctioning (Hotten, 2015). These circumstances are reflected in the cautionary tales of *Pañcatantra*'s fifth book, *Aparīkṣitakāritam*. "The King and the foolish Monkey" is a fable from the *Pañcatantra*, which teaches us that "Intelligence overpowers the foolishness" and that decisions need to be taken unhesitatingly. The foolish monkey unknowingly killed his master in his nap while guarding him from the irritable intervention of a fly. The monkey, the blunt target of keeping the fly away from his master, was brutally struck by the sword. These vulnerable whims are revealed in the immature decisions adopted by the companies, Enron and Volkswagen. The Enron scandal led

to a forceful investigation and the development of governance reforms through the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (Rockness & Rockness, 2005). Manipulation of financial reporting was done by the executives in the presence of the silent employees, and auditors substantiated the sheer failure of corporate governance and the absolute absence of ethical dissent. In response to the Volkswagen Dieselgate scandal, the company's sustainability and ESG report emphasized the need for maintaining governance reforms, environmental compliance, and transparency. This resonates with the *Mitra-bhed*aof *Pañcatantra* with a connotation that deception and distortion can be instrumental in the unanticipated downfall of the company (Volkswagen Group, 2025).

8.2. Pedagogical and Policy Model

The proposal for a value-added course for both academicians and professionals are designed to integrate philosophical and moral frameworks into contemporary education to gain insights into the significance of *dharma* and *karma*. The title suggested for such a course can be "Ethics, *dharma* and Corporate Responsibility: Lessons from *Pañcatantra*." This course can be aligned with the themes of responsibility, like Conscience, Dissent, and Ethico-Political Imagination.

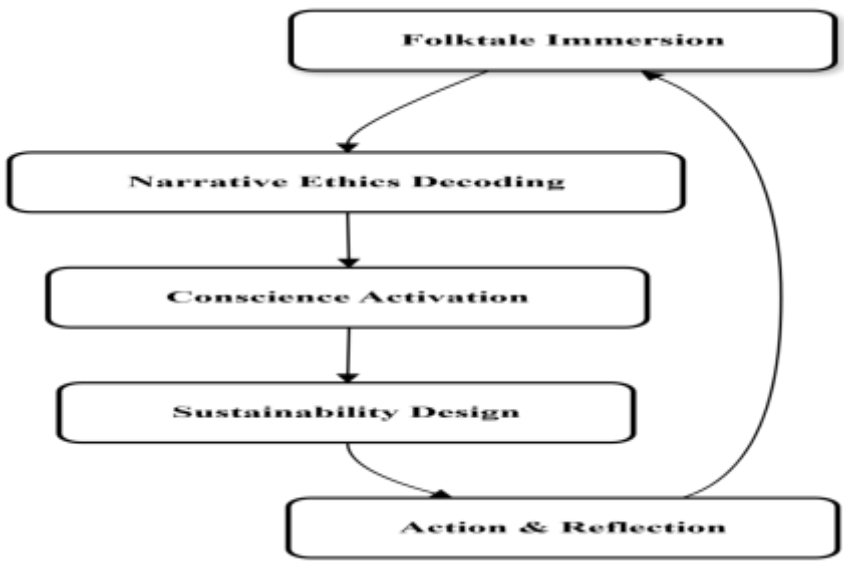


Figure 1: Educational Model for Transformative Learning through Narrative Ethics and Applied Dissent

As shown in Figure 1, the proposed model integrates *Pañcatantra* folklore, sustainability frameworks, and ethical-political pedagogy to foster morally courageous leaders who can navigate polarized organizational environments. It proceeds through five interlinked stages.

1. Folktale Immersion: Students are introduced to *Pañcatantra* stories without any explicit moral instruction to develop moral imagination through narratives rather than through abstract rule instruction (MacIntyre, 2007).
2. Narrative Ethics Decoding: Students analyze the ethical logic of the story and examine various aspects relating to folklore tales like motive, deception, power imbalances, and justice claims, learning ethical reasoning and Sen's (2009) concept of public reasoning.
3. Conscience Activation: Students face parallel corporate dilemmas deciding whether to conform or dissent by intentionally inserting learners into moral tension. This mirrors Arendt's (1971) framework of moral judgment and Gandhi's truth-based dissent (Gandhi, 1927). Responsibility is ethical before it is regulatory.
4. Sustainability Design: Ethical reflection is infused into modern responsibility frameworks (CSR, ESG, or SDG interventions) to align story insights with contemporary governance requirements. Presently ESG frameworks are ineffective because they are treated as mere reporting exercise rather than a virtue-based stewardship approach (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).
5. Action and Reflection: Applied dissent practices are integrated through whistleblowing simulations, journaling and ethical action planning for students to practice voicing dissent constructively mirroring real boardroom pressures (Millar et al., 2020). Pedagogically, the learning outcomes that emerge from this model include enhanced narrative strength, moral reasoning, stakeholder-based sustainability thinking, and the capacity to dissent ethically within institutional constraints. In polarized times, this framework can be referred to as *dharma*, as conscience is reawakened and is applied and practiced through corporate responsibility.

Here follows the Policy Recommendations for Integrating Indigenous Ethical Frameworks into B-Schools, Corporate

Governance and ESG Culture:
-Formalize indigenous ethical values (conscience, stewardship and reciprocity) as a public policy mandate for Higher Educational Institutions and corporations to create legitimacy and responsible leadership.
-Mandate integration of indigenous ethical values and *Pañcatantra*-based narrative reasoning in the B-school curriculum (finance, ethics, governance, and strategy) to avoid ethics being taught as a standalone subject (MacIntyre, 2007).
-Require structured training for faculty in narrative ethics, indigenous frameworks, and applied dissent to ensure that pedagogical delivery achieves intended learning outcomes grounded in indigenous cultural authenticity and practical ethical application.
-Establish Policies that mandates collaborative research, co-designed pedagogy, and knowledge sharing with indigenous communities ensuring reciprocity and epistemic dignity through co-creation with communities (Whyte, 2020).
-Corporate Boards should incorporate ethical stewardship and dissent protection into committee mandates and executive KPIs. This will facilitate value-based systems. Value-based systems always outperform compliance-only models (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). Boards must include qualitative narratives on ethical stewardship, stakeholder impacts, and the documentation of processes for addressing moral dissent in their ESG disclosures. This will ensure metrics-only "responsibility washing" is avoided (Sen, 2009). Also, institutions must create safe channels for ethical dissent and whistleblowing as acts of loyalty to the common good (Gandhi, 1927; Arendt, 1971).

8.3. Reimagining Corporate *Dharma* and Ethical Citizenship

The idea of Ethico-political imagination is leveraged as a corporate analog for civic virtue - an intellectual and moral capacity that helps the organization to look after justice, responsibility, and collective well-being, which goes beyond profit maximization (Nussbaum, 2011; Kaptein, 2019). Ethical citizenship requires organizations to treat their human capital fairly and justly (Crane & Matten, 2021). This transformation of

corporate behavior from a purely transactional engagement to benevolent involvement can help boost the community with conscience-driven participation in their efforts. The narrative pedagogy of the *Pañcatantra* presents a unique idea of generating a *dhārmic* spark among leaders, guiding them towards the path of nonviolence, welfare, and moral righteousness. This approach reframes profit not as an end but as an inherent output of the organization's relentless effort, one that can be multiplied through rationality, truthfulness, and foresight (Vishnu Sharma, trans. Olivelle, 1997). Hence, Corporate Dharma serves as a unifying moral architecture of diverse ethical frameworks like utilitarian efficiency, Kantian duty, Aristotelian virtue, and Gandhian trusteeship into a moral architecture (Sen, 2009; Gandhi, 1940). At times, both moral fatigue and ethical blindness can become causes of various damages, triggering ideological polarization. In confronting corporate polarization, an organization should aim for robust sustainability without compromising its core values. Also, managerial apathy can be arrested by foregrounding moral imagination (Werhane, 1999).

9. Conclusion

The magnificent lessons of the *Pañcatantra* unite organizational members, enabling them to set aside the limitations of emotional boundaries, moral fragmentation, and ideological bottlenecks within a corporate environment. The *Pañcatantra*'s narrative reiterates the importance of prudence, trust in relationships, loyalty, and strategic foresight. The stories gain completion when coupled with the essential strategies of the SDG framework, thereby bringing a new meaning to a contemporary corporate *dhārmic* reawakening. The SDG framework establishes global duties through measurable goals for justice, decent work, and responsible consumption.

Modern *dhārmic* style aligns between inner moral reflection and outward institutional accountability. This article examined in length, drawing a few notable discussions that illustrate how dissent might be reasonable for the common good without exposing the organization to open-cutthroat challenges. Hannah Arendt's call for independent judgment, Sen's emphasis on public

reasoning, and Gandhi's inclination towards truth-based resistance reflect Dissent in corporate, which is an integral part of institutional design, rather than an inspirational metaphor. These philosophical ideas of the then think tankers are undermined by the modern corporate world, as they believe in short-term gains, unethical incentivization policy in a bureaucratic style, and non-transparent and diffuse accountability. To bring corporate resilience, the article attempted to provide two-fold guidelines.

Firstly, a value-based education embodying the National Policy must be incorporated in the mainstream of management curricula by integrating the essence of *Pañcatantra's* wisdom. Secondly, the local chapters of the UN Global Compact should incorporate *dhārmic* ethics as culturally grounded guidance for responsible leadership. The above measures can effectively establish power, prudence, and justice to enhance the capacity to make right, timely, and unbiased corporate decisions, institutionalize corporate conscience, and eventually anchor global responsibility within a contextually meaningful moral tradition. The discussion concluded that, above the ideal moral allegory of *Pañcatantra*, its nuanced articulation to invoke pragmatism, etiquette, and ethical justice to navigate organizational crises and restore resilience should be considered by corporate leaders.

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