

# Environmental Consciousness and the Nine Schools of Indian Philosophy



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By

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**Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing**



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This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-4112-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4112-2

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUNDATIONS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Living beings, encompassing both humans and other creatures, encounter diverse challenges and obstacles throughout their life journeys. While many animals passively navigate the natural course of existence, humans possess a remarkable faculty: the intellectual capacity to actively shape and modify their surroundings. Unlike other beings, humans possess the agency to make choices that have wide-ranging consequences, not only for themselves but also for fellow humans, sentient creatures, and the entire planet. The repercussions of human actions extend beyond the immediate present, leaving a lasting impact on the surrounding world.

One urgent global issue that arises from the irresponsible and self-centered choices of humans is the state of environmental disharmony. At the core of human existence lies the faculty of reason, which fuels the quest for knowledge and understanding. Philosophy serves as a nurturing source that satiates our intellectual curiosity. It is inseparable from human existence, forming the foundation upon which thoughts, customs, culture, art, cuisine, education, religion, politics, science, technology, and the entire fabric of society flourish.

Given the imperative to address the well-being of our planet, it becomes crucial to embrace a philosophy that guides both humans and sentient beings toward holistic harmony, peace, and abundance. This philosophy should possess qualities of adaptability, inclusivity, and coherence, devoid of gaps or divisions in its framework. It must strike a delicate equilibrium between theoretical principles and practical applications, enabling us to navigate the complexities of everyday challenges and comprehend the profound metaphysical truths underpinning our existence.

Moreover, the adopted philosophy should emancipate all beings from suffering and be rooted in the values of cosmic equilibrium, universal friendship, and boundless compassion. It should possess the transformative power to instill tranquility across all aspects of life, spanning humans, animals, plants, rivers, and the interconnected ecosystems. Such a philosophy should celebrate and respect the inherent diversity of the

natural world, embracing all forms of life. By infusing our lives and the world at large with profound meaning, it should provide a sense of purpose and direction.

Additionally, the chosen philosophy should embody logical reasoning, ethical considerations, intrinsic value, and an acknowledgment of the metaphysical dimensions of existence. It should offer a comprehensive framework that addresses practical challenges while transcending the mundane, provoking contemplation on profound questions related to life, purpose, and the nature of reality.

Lastly, the philosophy we adopt should demonstrate flexibility and openness, accommodating diverse interpretations and perspectives. It should possess the capacity to adapt to ever-changing dynamics, be it temporal, spatial, or situational. Just as circumstances evolve, our philosophy should continually renew and reinterpret itself to align with the specific context and needs of the present moment.

By embracing a philosophy encompassing these attributes, we can pave the way for a harmonious coexistence with the planet and its inhabitants. It is through the collective adoption of such a philosophy that we can aspire to create a world where tranquility, interconnectedness, and mutual respect prevail, ultimately leading to a future marked by abundant well-being for all.

## **Understanding the Terms “Philosophy” and “Darśana”**

The term “philosophy” finds its etymological roots in ancient Greek, combining the words “Philo” (love) and “Sophia” (wisdom). It denotes a love and pursuit of wisdom, encompassing intellectual inquiry, rationality, and the search for fundamental truths about the nature of existence, knowledge, ethics, and reality. The Greek philosopher Pythagoras<sup>1</sup> is often attributed with coining the term, although there are debates and alternative theories regarding its origin.

In contrast, the Sanskrit word “Darśana” is derived from the root “Drś,” meaning “to see” or “to perceive.” However, its connotation extends beyond visual perception to include intellectual vision, intuitive insight, and spiritual realization. “Darśana” represents a holistic and all-encompassing

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson Gene, ‘Pythagoras and the Origin of Music Theory’, Indiana Theory Review, vol. 6, no. 3, Indiana University Press, USA, 1983, pp.35-61.



perspective, encompassing not only sensory perception but also mental faculties, contemplation, introspection, intuition, bodily experiences, and an awareness of the Ātman or the innermost self. It implies a direct and experiential understanding of reality that transcends mere intellectual analysis.

It is worth emphasizing that while the term “philosophy” is commonly used in the Western context to refer to the love of wisdom and intellectual inquiry, the term “Darśana” in the Indian context goes beyond a mere intellectual pursuit. It encompasses a holistic vision, intuitive insight, and a deeper experiential understanding of reality, incorporating aspects of spirituality, contemplation, and self-realization. Recognizing the unique characteristics and perspectives of Indian philosophical traditions allows for a more nuanced understanding of their contributions to the exploration of the human condition and the nature of existence.

When discussing Indian philosophical traditions, it is important to clarify the term “Indian” in its specific context. “Indian philosophy” or “Bhārtiyadarśana” refers to the rich and diverse philosophical traditions that have emerged and developed in the Indian subcontinent over thousands of years. These traditions encompass a wide range of philosophical perspectives, schools of thought, and spiritual paths. They explore fundamental questions about the nature of existence, consciousness, morality, the self, knowledge, and the ultimate reality.

The Upaniṣads, a collection of ancient texts considered the culmination of Vedic wisdom, are foundational to the development of Indian philosophy. They contain profound philosophical insights and teachings, delving into metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological inquiries. The Upaniṣads provide a philosophical edifice or “Darśanika” framework that sets the stage for subsequent philosophical systems and debates.

From the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, various philosophical schools emerged in India. Some schools, such as Jainism, Buddhism, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, and Advaita-Vedānta, endured and thrived, shaping the philosophical landscape of the subcontinent. These schools offered distinctive perspectives on reality, ethics, liberation, and the nature of the self. They developed intricate philosophical frameworks, intricate metaphysical systems, and ethical principles that guided individuals in their spiritual and worldly pursuits. However, not all schools of thought survived throughout history. Schools like Cārvāka and Ājīvika, which had different philosophical orientations, eventually declined or disappeared over time. Nevertheless,

the enduring philosophical traditions in India continue to inspire philosophical inquiry, spiritual practice, and intellectual discourse in contemporary times.

## **Cosmic Harmony and Moral Order: Foundations of Indian Philosophy**

Indian philosophy encompasses a diverse range of ideas that are united by a central focus on morality and ethical principles. The Vedas, ancient scriptures of India, introduce the concept of “Rta” as the cosmic moral order. Rta is not a mere speculative or mythical notion; rather, it represents an inherent and tangible reality that governs the moral codes of existence, nature, and individual roles. It is an unerring law that manifests in the natural phenomena observed in the world, encompassing all entities within the cosmos. The concept of Rta extends beyond human beings and becomes the foundational principle of the entire universe, encompassing both living and non-living entities.<sup>2</sup> It is Rta that governs the changing of seasons, the flow of water, the burning of fire, the production of milk by cows, and the existence of metals in solid states. Any deviation from this “universal order” poses a threat to the harmony of the cosmos.

Indian philosophy, with its unifying perspective, recognizes non-duality as the underlying basis of diversity.<sup>3</sup> Every living creature is viewed as a manifestation of the Divine, which is conscious and pulsating with life.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, everything that appears vividly is at its core ‘The Supreme.’<sup>5</sup> The R̥gveda lucidly states that the indescribable Supreme not just appears diversely but is experienced and described by the wise vividly.<sup>6</sup> This understanding of unity amidst diversity can be attained through wisdom (Jñāna), which is non-dual, comprehensive, and indivisible. However, to realize this state of unity, one must engage in the discipline of action (Karma) and wholehearted devotion (Bhakti), embodying unconditional submission to the Supreme.

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<sup>2</sup> The terms “living” and “non-living” are used for mass understanding. However, Indian philosophy sees everything as pulsating with consciousness. Therefore, what science terms as non-living (i.e., machinery, table, chair etc) are also considered as having latent consciousness in Indian thought.

<sup>3</sup> Chandogyopnishad, 3.14.1 (सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म, sarvam khalu idam Brahman)

<sup>4</sup> Vedantasara, 2.3 (तादात्म्य इदम् सर्वम्, tadātmyamidam sarvam)

<sup>5</sup> Yajurveda, 31.19 (अजायमानो बहुधा विजायते, ajāyamāno bahudhā vijāyate)

<sup>6</sup> R̥gveda, 1.164.46 (एकम् सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति, ekam sat viprāḥ bahudhā vadanti)

In Indian philosophy, the interplay between non-duality and the diverse manifestations of existence highlights the interconnectedness of all beings and the ultimate reality. It emphasizes the importance of moral conduct, ethical living, and the recognition of the Divine in all aspects of life. Through the paths of wisdom, action, and devotion, individuals strive to attain a deeper understanding of the underlying unity and transcend the apparent divisions and distinctions of the world.

## **Indian Philosophy and the Words “Hīndū, Hīndustān”**

The term “Hīndū” holds significance when considered in its proper historical and cultural context. Contrary to misconceptions, it was not originally used in Bhāratavarṣa (India) to denote a specific religious or cultural identity. Instead, it simply referred to individuals born within the geographical boundaries of Bhāratavarṣa.

According to the British scholar Gavin Flood, the term “Hīndū” originated as a Persian geographical designation, specifically used to describe people residing east of the Indus River (Siṅdhunadī). This usage can be traced back to the inscriptions of Darius-I<sup>7</sup> in the 6th century BCE. Furthermore, in the 7th century CE, the Chinese text Great Tang Records of Western Regions by Xuanzang<sup>8</sup> introduced the term “Hīndū” with a religious connotation for the first time. It is worth noting that a misconception exists, perpetuated by a small group of academicians with vested interests, that the Persians introduced the term “Hīndū” and that it is absent from ancient Indian texts. However, ancient Indian texts do contain references to the term “Hīndū.”

By understanding the historical development and linguistic evolution of the term “Hīndū,” we can appreciate its original geographical usage and the subsequent religious connotations it acquired. It is important to approach the term with a nuanced understanding, recognizing its multifaceted nature and its varied usage across different historical periods and contexts. Let’s examine the basis behind this assertion,

If we consider the Bṛhaspatiāgama, it mentions;

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<sup>7</sup> Chakravarti Ranabir, *Materials Background of Darius I’s Invasion of India*, Vol.43, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Delhi, 1982, pp.165-170.

<sup>8</sup> Sharma Arvind, *On Hindu, Hindustan, Hinduism and Hindutva Vol.49*, Numen, Netherlands, 2002, pp.1-36.

हिमालयं समारभ्य यावत् इन्दुसरोवरम्।  
तं देवनिर्मितं देशं हिन्दुस्थानं प्रचक्षते॥

**himālayaṁ samārabhya yāvat iṇḍu sarovaram|**  
**taṁ devnirvitaṁ deśaṁ hindusthānam prachakṣyate||<sup>9</sup>**

(Starting from the Himālaya, extending up to the Indian Ocean is the place of divinity called “Hīndusthānam (Hīndū+Sthānam).”)

The term “Hīndū” encompasses a rich historical and cultural significance. It is derived from various sources, indicating the geographical, mythological, and religious contexts associated with it.

One interpretation suggests that the word “Hīndū” is formed by combining the prefixes “Hi” and “Iṇḍu” from “Himālaya” (referring to the Himalayan range) and “Iṇḍusarovaram” (Indian Ocean) respectively. This implies that the term “Hīndū” denotes the people inhabiting the vast area between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean. Another viewpoint proposes that the word “Hīndū” originates from the name of the Hīndūkuṣa Mountain. According to this interpretation, the Hīndūs were the inhabitants of the Himalayan region under the rule of “King Kuṣa,” the capable son of Lord Rāma. These inhabitants were distinguished by a mark or dot, known as the Bīndū, placed between their eyebrows (Ajñācakra).<sup>10</sup> Thus, the combination of the prefix “Hi” from Himālaya and the suffix “Iṇḍū” from Bīndū gave rise to the word “Hīndū.”

Throughout recorded history, the term “Hīndū” has been present in ancient texts, such as the Bṛhaspatiāgama and the Rāmāyaṇa. It is important to note that being a “Hīndu” implies practicing the core tenets of Hīndudharma. These principles include non-violence towards all living beings, reverence for Gaumātā (the cow), a sense of surrender towards Bhāratvarṣa (India), belief in Punarjanma (reincarnation), and adherence to the foundational mantra of AUM.

By understanding the multifaceted origins and connotations of the term “Hīndū,” we can appreciate its historical significance and its association with the rich cultural traditions and values of the Indian subcontinent.

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas F.W, *Bṛhaspatisutra*, Vidya Prakash Press, Lahore, 1921, v.3.69-3.72, p.19

<sup>10</sup> The Ajnachakra is situated between the eyebrows. It isn't a part of the physical body rather it is counted as a part of Pranic system. The position of the chakra makes it a holy spot where Hindus apply a vermilion mark. The same corresponds with the pineal gland.

The Bṛhadasmṛti emphasizes that,

हिंदूः धर्मस्य सिद्धान्तान् अधर्मबलान् जयेन पराजयितुं समर्थः, सर्वारिषड्वर्गोपेतः,  
शौर्यवान्ति दयायुतः, अहिंसायाम्, सत्याम्, गौमातायाः प्रतिष्ठां प्राणीति स्थापयन्, हिंदूः  
इति वदते।

**Hīndūḥ dharmāṣya siddhāntān adharmabalān jayen parājayitūṁ  
samarthaḥ, sarvāriṣaḍvargopetaḥ, śauryavānti dayāyutaḥ, ahinsāyām,  
satyām, gaumātāyāḥ pratiṣṭhām prāṇīti sthāpayan, hīndūḥ iti  
vadyate**<sup>11</sup>

(Hīndū is someone who upholds the principles of Dharma by overcoming the forces of evil, while embodying qualities of nobility, compassion, non-violence, honesty, and reverence for Gaumātā)

The term “Hīndū” is also associated with the notion of being a Gobhakta, one who worships the Mother Cow. This connotation can be found in ancient Vedic texts such as the Bṛhadasmṛti, Ṛgveda, and the Śaiva text “Merutaṅtra,” indicating its ancient origins that date back to the time of the Rgveda.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to recognize that the term “Hīndū” predates the emergence of figures such as Zarathustra, Christ, and Muhammad. It existed in antiquity and has roots in the Vedic traditions. Contrary to popular belief, the word “Hīndustāna” is not a term given by the Mughals. Rather, it is a combination of the Sanskrit words “Hīndū” and “Sthānam.” “Hīndū” refers to the people of the region, while “Sthānam” denotes a place or land. It is worth noting that some scholars suggest that “Sthānam” has Persian origins.

Additional references to the word “Hīndū” can be found in texts like Mādhavācāryadigvijay, which describes a Hīndū as,

“A Hīndū who embraces the foundational mantra of Omkāra, holds unwavering faith in rebirth, reveres the cow as a mother, considers

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<sup>11</sup> (i) Shankaracharya Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati Maharaj (Govardhan Math), *The Meaning of the Word 'Hindu'*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcB3vh2\\_Be8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcB3vh2_Be8)

(ii) Brihatsmṛiti

<sup>12</sup> (i) Pahoja Murlidhar, *Antiquity and Origin of the Term Hindu*, Online, 2020 [www.vedicilluminations.com](http://www.vedicilluminations.com).

(ii) Ojha Raghunath Shastri, *Merutantram*, Kshemraj Shrikrishna Prakashan, Chennai, 2017.

Bhāratavarṣa as their spiritual teacher, and denounces violence against all beings.”<sup>13</sup>

Before we accept the above said arguement, it becomes imperative to have a look at the following R̥gvedic R̥cā,

आ विश्ववाराश्विना गतं नः पर तत सथानमवाचि वां पर्थिव्याम । अश्वो न वाजी  
शुनप्रुष्ठो अस्थादा यत सेदथुर्ध्रुवसे न योनिम । यानि सथानान्यश्विना दधाथे दिवो  
यह्नीष्वोषधीषु विक्षु । नि पर्वतस्य मूर्धनि सदन्तेषं जनाय दाशुषेवहन्ता ॥ चनिष्टं देवा  
ओषधीष्वप्सु यद योग्या अश्रवैथे रषीणाम ।

ā viśvavārāśvinā ghatam naḥ pra tat sthānamavāci vāṃ pṛthivyām |  
aśvo na vājī śunapṛṣṭho asthādā yat sedathurdhruvase na yonim ॥<sup>14</sup>  
yāni sthānānyaśvinā dadhāthe divo yahviśvośadhīṣu vikṣu | ni  
parvatasya mūrdhani sadanteṣam janāya dāśuṣevahantā || caniṣṭam  
devā ośadhīṣvapsu yad yoghyā aśnavaithe ṛṣīṇām ॥<sup>15</sup>

(It is rich in all beings O Ashwins! This place on earth is your own possession. Just like a strong horse with a steady, balanced back, you become the steady foundation of all. O Aśvins, whatever dwellings you hold in the fields of men or in the streams of heaven, that which rest upon the mountains, or those that provide food to the one who offers oblation and delights you, the divine herbs, the waters and the R̥ṣis who offer the same to you and whom you find deserving.)

Indeed, the term “Sthānam” and its variations can be found in numerous Vedic hymns, further supporting the assertion that “Hīndustāna,” “Hīndusthāna,” or “Hīndusthānam” are not words introduced by Persians or Mughals. Instead, their origins can be clearly traced back to the Vedic literature. These terms denote a geographical location that lies between the Hīndūkuṣaparvata (Hindu Kush mountains) and Iṇḍusarovaram (the Indian Ocean). Consequently, all living beings, including animals, plants, rivers, and other sentient entities within this region, can be referred to as “Hīndustānis,” “Hīndusthānis,” “Bhāratvāsi,” or “Bhāratnivāsi.” These terms highlight the inherent connection between the inhabitants and the land they dwell in, emphasizing their identity as the people of the land between the mountains and the ocean.

<sup>13</sup> Swami Tapasyananda, ‘Shankaradigvijay’, Shri Rama Krishna Matha, Chennai, 2015. ओङ्कारमूलमन्त्राण्यः पुनर्जन्मदशाशयः गोभक्तो भारतगुरु हिन्दुर्हिसनदूषकः। हिसया दूयते चिन्तां तेन हिन्दुरितीरितः॥ omkāra mūlmantrānyaḥ punarjanma dridhāśyaḥ gobhakto bhāratguru hīndurhisana dūṣkaḥ | himsayā dūyate chīntam tena hīndurīritah॥

<sup>14</sup> R̥gveda, 7.70.1

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 7.70.3

Certainly, in addition to the aforementioned references, further historical evidence supports the presence of the word “Hiṇḍū” in ancient times. The inscriptions of Persian monarch Darius, found in locations such as Hamadan, Persepolis, and Naqsh-I-Rostam, mention the term “Hidū (Hiṇḍū)” to describe the people living within his empire. These inscriptions, which date back to the period between 520 and 485 BCE, establish the usage of the term “Hi(ṇ)ḍū” at least five hundred years prior to the birth of Christ. This historical evidence emphasizes the antiquity and prevalence of the term in referring to a specific group of people during that era.<sup>16</sup>

The Darius-I DPh<sup>17</sup> inscriptions in the foundation of Apadan palace states,

“Darius the Great, the son of Hystaspes and an Achaemenid king, says, ‘This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Sacae who are beyond Sogdia to Kush, and from Sind (“Hidauv,” locative of “Hidūs,” i.e., “Indus valley”) to Lydia (“Spardā”). This is what Ahuramazda, the greatest of gods, bestowed upon me. Ahuramazda, protect me and my royal house.’<sup>18</sup>

Additional evidence supporting the antiquity of the word “Hiṇḍū” comes from the inscriptions of Xerxes, who succeeded Darius as the king of the Achaemenid Empire. These inscriptions found in Persepolis and dating between 485 and 465 BCE, list “Hiṇḍus” as one of the provinces under the Achaemenid rule. This inclusion of “Hiṇḍus” as an Indian province further reinforces the notion that the term “Hiṇḍū” has a long history and was recognized as a distinct region within the Achaemenid Empire after the conquest of the Indus Valley.<sup>19</sup>

The Aśokan inscriptions from the 3rd century BCE provide further evidence of the usage of the term “Hida” or “Hiṇḍ” in reference to Bhāratvarṣa (India) and “Hidaloka” for Hiṇḍuloka (the land of the Hiṇḍus). These inscriptions prominently feature the term “Hida” and its derivatives more than seventy times<sup>20</sup>, emphasizing its significance in identifying the land and its people. This historical evidence solidifies the

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<sup>16</sup> Chattopadhyaya, S., *The Achaemenids and India*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1974, pp.25-29.

<sup>17</sup> Collection of Old Persian cuneiform texts from the sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries BCE, left by the royal Achaemenid kings as inscriptions on their official monuments.

<sup>18</sup> Mousavi Ali, *Persepolis: Discovery and Afterlife of a World Wonder*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2012, pp.171-181.

<sup>19</sup> Sethna, Kaikhushru Dhunjibhoy, *Problems of Ancient India*, Aditya Prakashan, Delhi, 2000, p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> Pandeya Rajbali, *Ashoka ke Abhilekha*, Gyanmandala, Varanasi, 2020, p.79

longstanding presence and recognition of the word “Hiṅdū” in the cultural and linguistic landscape of ancient India. The evidence presented above clearly demonstrates that the term “Hiṅdū” is not a contemporary term but has deep roots in ancient Indian texts. Additionally, it is important to note that Vedic texts often interchange the letters “H (ह)” and “S (स).” Some scholars argue that the absence of the word “Hiṅdū” in ancient Indian texts is due to the fact that Persians pronounced “S (स)” as “H (ह).” As a result, they began referring to the people living along the Siṅdhu river as “Hiṅdū.” This linguistic perspective sheds light on the evolution of the term and its association with the geographical region of the Indus Valley.<sup>21</sup> This narrative, which attempts to associate the term “Hiṅdū” with Persian influence, has been propagated through flawed education and questionable motives. In order to uncover the truth, it is crucial to turn to our ancient texts for clarification. The Bhaviṣyapurāṇa, for instance, uses the word “Siṅdhusthānam” to refer to Hiṅdhusthānam, which signifies the land of the great Āryas. This reference from a revered ancient scripture highlights the indigenous origin and significance of the term “Hiṅdū” within our own cultural and historical context.<sup>22</sup> The Ṛgveda uses Siṅdhu in place of Hiṅdū as it says,

नेता सिंधुनाम

netā siṅdhunāma<sup>23</sup>

(The one who leads others on to the path of virtue is known as  
“Siṅdhu/Hiṅdū.”)

Here “S (स)” is used in the word “सिंधुनाम” in place of “H (ह).”

The ancient Saṁskṛit dictionary “Nighaṅṭu” explains the Vedic Rīcā “हरितो न रेह्या (harito na raṁhya)”<sup>24</sup> by stating,

सरिता हरिता भवन्ति

saritā haritā bhavanti

(“Saritā” and “Haritā” refer to one another.)

Here “H (ह)” in the word “हरितो” is used in place of “S (स)” and Nighaṅṭu explains that ‘Haritā’ and ‘Saritā’ are the same.

<sup>21</sup> Williams Monier Sir, Hinduism, *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, Pott Young & Co, New York, 1877, pp.1-2.

<sup>22</sup> (i) Shankaracharya Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati Maharaj (Govardhan Math), *The Meaning of the Word ‘Hindu’*.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcB3vh2\\_Be8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcB3vh2_Be8)

(ii) Upadhyay Babugam, *Bhaviṣyapurana*, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Rigveda, 7.5.2

<sup>24</sup> Atharvaveda, 20.30.4



Based on the aforementioned information, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the Vedas demonstrate the interchangeable use of the letters “H (ह)” and “S (स).” This indicates a linguistic flexibility within the ancient texts. Secondly, the word “Hindū” can be traced back to its Vedic and historical origins, disproving the claim that it is a contemporary term. Additionally, it is evident that the word “Hindustān” does not have Persian or Islamic origins, contrary to popular belief.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that “Hindūdharmā” or “Sanātandharmā” does not have divisions or specific ideologies like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Instead, it is centered around a natural code of conduct and an all-encompassing universal law. This highlights the inclusive and unifying nature of Hindu philosophy.

In light of these findings, it is crucial to acknowledge that all the philosophical systems that emerged in the sacred land of Bhāratavarṣa are essentially various manifestations of “Hindū Darśana,” “Bhārtiya Darśana,” or Indian Philosophies. This emphasizes the diversity and richness of philosophical thought that originated from the Indian subcontinent.

### **Indian Philosophy: Love for Life Lived in Wisdom**

Indian philosophy, deeply rooted in the principle of “unity in diversity,” encompasses a unique approach to understanding truth. In the Indian tradition, the concept of Darśana, or vision of truth, extends to all aspects of life. This distinguishes Bhārtiyadarśana, or Indian philosophy, as a distinct and inclusive philosophical system.

In India, individuals are free to choose their own path towards realizing the Ultimate Truth. There is no imposition of fear of hell or judgment to compel religious practices. While people in the West live freely, they think constrainedly, and in India, people live constrainedly but think freely. The Western perspective often revolves around the pursuit of pleasure through material possessions external to oneself. However, Indian traditions emphasize the quest for truth and inner happiness, placing less importance on material possessions that are transient, subject to change, and ultimately lead to death or decay.

It is essential to understand that Indian philosophy is not merely a theoretical or intellectual speculation, nor is it confined to a specific dogma, creed, or gospel. It is a way of life that draws from the personal experiences of the great Ṛṣis (Sages) and has been passed down through

generations via the sacred “Guru-śiṣya Paraṃparā” (teacher-disciple tradition). This profound wisdom aims to benefit all beings and contribute to their well-being and prosperity.

Indian philosophy provides a comprehensive methodology that goes beyond the limitations of the senses and mind. It offers a well-engineered path to directly experience the Transcendental Reality, leading to the realization of the Ultimate Truth. It is a transformative journey that allows individuals to transcend the confines of the material world and connect with the essence of existence itself. Prof. S.R. Bhatt explains this in the most appropriate fashion,

“Indian philosophy is not mere love for wisdom, rather, it is love for the ideal life lived in wisdom. It is not a mere view of life, but a way of life. It has an essential practical orientation. It is essentially goal-oriented in the form of the fullest efflorescence of our inherent potentialities, and therefore it is also called “Mokṣaśāstra.” So, any account of philosophy has to begin with the philosophy of life, lived and to be lived in this cosmos. It is thus a search for the ideal of life along with an endeavor to realize the same.”<sup>25</sup>

The nine schools of Indian philosophy recognize the inherent value of every form of life. They uphold the belief that the cosmos is a harmonious unity composed of interconnected and interdependent elements. They emphasize the notion of dharma, which encompasses righteousness, duty, and moral responsibility towards all living entities. The teachings of Indian philosophy promote the idea that every individual has a unique role to play in the grand tapestry of existence.

The principles of non-violence (ahimsa), compassion (karuna), and respect for all forms of life are central to Indian philosophical traditions. They emphasize the interconnectedness of humans with the natural world and advocate for a holistic approach to life. The philosophical schools provide various frameworks and perspectives to explore and understand the nature of reality, consciousness, and the ultimate purpose of existence.

While the nine schools of Indian philosophy may differ in their specific doctrines and philosophical approaches, they all share a common emphasis on the fundamental unity of existence. They recognize the inherent worth and value of every individual and uphold the notion of a holistic and inclusive worldview. Thus, the Vedas rightly announce,

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<sup>25</sup> Bhatt S.R, *Philosophical Foundations of Education*, Springer Nature, Singapore, 2018, p.2.

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णतिपूर्णमुदच्यते। पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते।।  
ॐ शान्तिः ! शान्तिः ! शान्तिः !

**om pūrnamadaḥ pūrnamidam pūrnātāpūrnāmudacyate | pūrnasaya  
pūrnāmādaya pūrnāmevāvaśiśyathe || om shāntih !shāntih !sāntih !**<sup>26</sup>  
(That “One” is complete, and so is this one for completeness manifests  
from completeness. if you subtract or add anything to ‘completeness,’ that  
which remains is “completeness.” Aum peace! peace! peace!)

ॐ शान्ता द्यौः शान्ता पृथ्वी, शान्तमिदमुर्वन्तरिक्षम्।  
शान्ता उदन्वतीरापः, शान्ता नः सन्त्वोषधीः।।

**om śāntā dyauḥ śāntā pṛthivī, śāntam idam urvantarikṣam|  
śāntā udanvatīr āpaḥ, śāntā naḥ santu ouśadhīḥ**||<sup>27</sup>

(Let peace prevail in the sky. Let peaceful be the earth. Let the entire  
atmosphere be rooted in peace. Let the flowing waters, plants, and herbs be  
peaceful.)

ॐ इन्द्रो विश्वस्य राजत। शं नो अस्तु द्विपदे, शं चतुष्पदे।।

**om indro viśvasya rājat| śaṁ no astu dvipade, śaṁ catuṣpade** ||<sup>28</sup>  
(O Lord of the universe! bestow peace upon those who walk on two and  
four feet.)

## **Cultivating Harmony: Indian Philosophy’s Vision of Coexistence**

The concept of the Ultimate Reality in Indian philosophy transcends discrimination and embraces the unity of all beings. As depicted in the Bhagavad Gita and other scriptures, the incarnations of the Ultimate Reality, such as Matsya (Fish), Kurma (Tortoise), Varaha (Boar), Narasimha (Man-Lion), Vamana (Dwarf), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and the future incarnation as Kalki, serve to protect Dharma without distinguishing between animals and humans. This underscores the significance of venerating and respecting all forms of life.

The Indian philosophical tradition upholds mutual respect, harmonious cooperation, and peaceful coexistence as fundamental principles. These principles are pursued across various schools of Indian philosophy, seeking to establish a world characterized by such values.

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<sup>26</sup> Ishavasyaupanishad, Invocation

<sup>27</sup> Atharvaveda, 19.9.1

<sup>28</sup> Yajurveda, 36.8

In Chapter Eleven of the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna is granted a vision of the universal form (Viśwarūpa)<sup>29</sup> of Lord Krishna, which leaves him awestruck. In this form, Arjuna witnesses the entire cosmos, comprising billions of planets, suns, animals, insects, and birds, as the embodiment of Krishna. This revelation highlights the divinity inherent in the entire cosmos, emphasizing that everything that exists is an integral part of the interconnected whole.

Unfortunately, contemporary societal perspectives have been influenced by consumerism, largely stemming from an education system that promotes dualism, consumeristic tendencies, and domination. In contrast, Indian philosophy rests upon three pillars:

1. **Sehvāsa:** This principle advocates peaceful coexistence as a means to foster a harmonious and peaceful world, ultimately leading to emancipation. Liberation in this context extends beyond the metaphysical realm and encompasses freedom from violence, corruption, war, poverty, environmental degradation, lack of education, animal cruelty, crime, and various other societal challenges. Coexistence encompasses a holistic approach to living in harmony with oneself, family, community, environment, all living creatures, nation, world, and the cosmos.
2. **Sehkāra:** Co-operation, or the act of working together towards material and spiritual achievements, is emphasized as “Sehkāra.” Cooperation can only flourish in an environment of peaceful coexistence (Sehvāsa), where material progress and spiritual growth can be pursued. The notion of working together extends beyond human interactions to include the assistance and contributions of the natural world, including the five elements, trees, animals, and other entities. Thus, the accomplishments attained in material and spiritual realms are products of collective contributions.
3. **Sehbhoga:** This principle entails enjoying the fruits derived from peaceful coexistence (Sehvāsa) and cooperation (Sehkāra) by all individuals. The benefits (Prasāda) obtained from coexistence and cooperation should not be limited to personal gain (Aham), but should extend to the welfare of all (Sarvam) with humility and surrender. It is essential to distribute these benefits selflessly, without possessiveness. The distribution of Prasāda should

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<sup>29</sup> Goindka Harikrishna Das, Shrimadbhagwagita Shankarabhashya, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 2013, pp.263-272.

prioritize the well-being of all, and any remaining portions should be consumed with a sense of sacrifice (Tyāga) and welfare of all creatures (Sarvabhūtāhita).

By adhering to these principles, Indian philosophy presents a holistic way of life that facilitates the direct experience of the Ultimate Truth. It transcends mere intellectual speculation, dogma, creed, or gospel, offering a comprehensive framework that surpasses the limitations of the senses and mind, guiding individuals towards the realization of the Transcendental Reality.

### **The Interconnectedness of All Life: Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam<sup>30</sup>**

The ancient Ṛṣis of India possessed a profound understanding that nature is intricately connected to humanity, emphasizing the interconnectedness within the circle of life. Indian philosophy has consistently acknowledged and revered Mother Nature, trees, animals, humans, and even non-living objects as entities sharing the same consciousness since time immemorial. In this harmonious relationship, people lived longer, happier lives, coexisting in balance with their surroundings and culture. However, as time has passed, this connection has weakened, leading to a disorientation from our true identity and roots.

Culture serves as an outward expression of our spiritual and religious beliefs, embodying the essence of our traditions and society. While scientific and technological advancements have brought comfort and convenience, they have also resulted in unintended consequences. It is crucial not to disregard or neglect our cultural and intellectual heritage, which has provided inspiration, unity, and meaning to our lives. The wisdom of our great Ṛṣis has always maintained a profound connection with Nature, guiding us toward the realization of the Highest Self, where the principle of ‘All is One and One is All’ prevails.

India is blessed with the invaluable treasure of knowledge imparted by the great seers, the infallible Vedas, and the philosophical Upaniṣads. This land has been nurtured by timeless thoughts, teachings, and philosophies

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<sup>30</sup> Mahopnishad, 6.71-72 (अयं बन्धुरयंनेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥ ayaṁ bandhuryaṁneti gaṇanā laghucetasām udāracaritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam)

left behind by divine beings such as Mahāvira, Buddha, Maḥarṣi Patañjali, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, and many others. According to the Vedas, the entire cosmos operates in accordance with the cosmic law of ‘Ṛta,’ and all beings are intricately interconnected within a well-linked chain. Humans, animals, mountains, trees, and insects are all integral parts of the “One Non-dual Whole,” and none exist independently from the other. Our survival and well-being depend on our unity and interdependence, a concept expounded by Lord Buddha in Praṭṭyasamutpāda (the theory of dependent origination) and repeatedly emphasized by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in His texts and Bhāṣyas, imbued with Advaitvāda (the theory of non-dualism).

The nine glorious philosophies that developed within the womb of Bhāratvarṣa must be understood as interconnected components rather than isolated compartments. Just as the human body consists of diverse parts, each serving its own function while remaining rooted in and functioning together with the body, these nine schools collectively contribute to the entirety of Indian philosophy. The Vedas are regarded as a primary source of knowledge by the six philosophical schools (śad darśana), namely Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, and Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta. Conversely, the non-Vedic schools, namely Cārvāka, Jaina, and Bauddha, reject the authority of the Vedas. Despite the varied approaches toward the Vedas, they remain the wellspring of unparalleled wisdom.

Before delving into the perspectives of the nine schools of Indian philosophical systems concerning the environment, it is essential to explore the references related to the environment found within the Vedas.

# CHAPTER I

## ENVIRONMENTAL REFLECTIONS IN VEDIC SCRIPTURES

In a world at a critical turning point, humanity finds itself grappling with disoriented internal states. Driven by the corrosive forces of greed, competition, ego, and an unyielding ambition to assert dominion over the world, these internal struggles materialize as pollution, wars, riots, cruelty towards sentient creatures, and a myriad of societal discord. As we shape the world around us, our inner selves awaken, and the cosmic symphony of our environment echoes our troubled interior and corrupted external atmosphere. This disharmony arises from our collective loss of self-awareness, reducing everything to mere material significance.

Amidst this tumult, the Vedas emerge as a resplendent source of guidance, offering verses that illuminate the path to attaining inner purity and external harmony. They beckon us towards the realization of the elusive “Ultimate Self/Final Truth/Highest Wisdom/Supreme Divinity,” a lofty aspiration that remains beyond reach as long as our internal and external landscapes remain adrift in constant flux.

This chapter directs our attention to the profound pronouncements within the Vedas, highlighting their profound message of holistic cosmic harmony. The compassionate and unified perspective they espouse forms the bedrock of environmental purification and reverence. We must recognize that superficial displays of morality and ethics merely scratch the surface, unless we embark upon the journey towards inner perfection.

In the quest for a harmonious existence, let us heed the wisdom encoded within the Vedas, charting a course towards unity of self and alignment with the rhythms of the cosmos. By embracing this transcendent vision, we can hope to restore equilibrium within ourselves and forge a more harmonious world for generations to come.

## The Vedas: Ancient Foundation of Profound Wisdom

The Vedas are the ancient sacred texts that serve as the cornerstone of spiritual and intellectual exploration. Written in Saṁskṛit, these timeless scriptures hold unparalleled significance for followers of Saṁātana Dharma, commonly known as Hinduism. However, their wisdom extends far beyond specific religious boundaries, offering profound insights and guidance to seekers of truth across all castes, creeds, genders, religions, species, and nationalities.

The aim of this research is to unravel the profound teachings contained in the Vedas, exploring their multidimensional nature and their ability to transcend temporal and spatial limitations. By examining the cosmic order, the interconnectedness of all creation, and the fundamental principles governing the universe, we seek to uncover the intrinsic wisdom that lies within the Vedic scriptures.

The term “Veda” itself embodies the essence of knowledge and enlightenment, originating from the Saṁskṛit root “Vid,” meaning ‘to know.’ The Vedas encompass both Parāvidyā, the wisdom of the inner Self, and Aparāvidyā, the material knowledge of the external world. These sacred texts, believed to be of divine origin, are regarded as Apauruṣeya, devoid of human authorship, and are organized into four principal sections: Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, and Atharvaveda. These four are further subdivided into;

- **Saṁhita** (The text of methodologically arranged Mañtras, hymns, prayers.)
- **Brāhmaṇas** (The text associated with Saṁhita that explains the symbolism of ceremonies.)
- **Āraṇyakas** (The text that explains the philosophy behind rituals.)
- **Upaniṣads** (The philosophical texts of non-dual wisdom that are the culminating part of the Vedas and are also referred to as Vedānta.)

The Vedas, known as “Śruti,” meaning “that which is heard,” were revealed to the seven enlightened sages (Saptaṛṣi)<sup>1</sup> during profound states

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<sup>1</sup> Brihdarnayakaopanishad, 2.2.4, pp.326-327. (इमावेव गौतमभरद्वाजावयमेव गौतमोऽयं भरद्वाज इमावेव विश्वामित्रजमदग्नी अयमेव विश्वामित्रोऽयं जमदग्निरिमावेव वसिष्ठकश्यपावयमेव वसिष्ठोऽयं कश्यपो वागेवात्रिर्वाचा ह्यत्रमद्यतेऽत्तिर्ह वै नामैतद्यदत्रिरिति सर्वस्यात्ता भवति सर्वमस्यान्नं भवति य एवं वेद॥; imāveva gotamabharadvājāvayameva



of contemplation. They convey a profound understanding that all aspects of existence are intricately interconnected manifestations of the Ultimate Truth (Satyasyasatyam). These ancient scriptures emphasize the intrinsic relationship between the individual and the entire cosmos, highlighting the notion of self-sameness. Just as the human body is the abode of an individual being, the cosmos is the divine dwelling place of the Supreme Being.

At the core of Vedic wisdom lies the principle of 'Ṛta' - the cosmic order that governs the harmonious functioning of the universe, as well as the ethical, moral, symphonic, and orderly conduct of humanity. 'Ṛta' embodies righteousness, truth, harmony, eternity, lawfulness, and justice. Its antithesis is 'Anṛta' - that which is contrary to cosmic order. The concept of Satya (Truth) holds a central position and serves as the foundation of Indian philosophical thought, rooted firmly in the principles of 'Ṛta.' The Vedas unequivocally declare that Satya and Dharma (righteousness) always prevail, regardless of challenges. Such is the significance of these principles that a portion of the following Sanskrit verse is engraved on India's national emblem;

सत्यमेव जयते नाऽनृतम्।  
**satyameva jayate nānṛtam<sup>2</sup>**  
 (Truth alone triumphs; not falsehood)

"Ṛta" occupies a vital ethico-metaphysical position, transcending boundaries and permeating the entire cosmos. It stands as an immutable principle, deeply rooted in the Vedic tradition. The concept of Karma finds its origin in the profound understanding of "Ṛta." Aligned with the ethical framework of "Ṛta," the Bhagavadgītā explicitly denounces qualities such as falsehood, gambling, cruelty, violence, sensual indulgence, and illicit means of acquiring wealth, categorizing them as demonic.<sup>3</sup> Hence, it becomes evident that the Bhagavadgītā draws its profound insights on Karma, Bhakti, Jñāna, and ethics directly from the teachings of the Vedas.

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gotamo'yaṁ bharadvāja imāveva viśvāmitrajamadagnī ayameva viśvāmitro'yaṁ jamadagnirimāveva vasiṣṭhakaśyapāvayameva vasiṣṭho'yaṁ kaśyapo vāgevātririvācā hyannamadyate'ttirha vai nāmaidadyadatririti sarvasyāttā bhavati sarvamasyānnaṁ bhavati ya evaṁ veda||).

<sup>2</sup> Mundakopnishad, 3.1.6. (सत्यमेवजयते नानृतं सत्येन पन्था विततो देवयानः। येनाक्रमन्त्यृषयो ह्याप्तकामा यत्र तत् सत्यस्य परमं निधानम् ॥ satyamevajayate nānṛtam satyena panthā vitato devayānaḥ| yenākramantyaṛṣayo hyāptakāmā yatra tat satyasya paramaṁ nidhānaḥ |)

<sup>3</sup> Shrimadbhagvadgita, 16.13-16.20.

To truly grasp the essence of “Dharma,” it is imperative to comprehend its contextual significance before delving deeper into the nine schools of Indian philosophy. Dharma serves as the seed from which the immortal tree of values, ethics, responsibilities, and virtues sprouts. It embodies both morality and reality, with the understanding that whatever is moral is inherently true. The term “Dharma” derives from the Sanskrit root “Dhr,” which conveys the notions of sustenance, upholding, and uplifting. Epistemologically, Dharma is defined as the harmonious force that upholds, enriches, and sustains the entire cosmos and all sentient beings. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of “Dharma,” it becomes essential to explore its seven recognized meanings,

1. **Dharma as Svabhāva of an Entity:** Within this framework, “Dharma” embodies the intrinsic essence of all worldly entities. It represents the fundamental property, nature, or inclination of an object or being. It is the driving force behind birth, sustenance, regulation, transformation, and decay. For instance, a river’s Dharma lies in its continuous flow, as fluidity is the inherent nature of water. Living in accordance with this Dharma means honoring and aligning with one’s own intrinsic nature and respecting the inherent qualities of others. Consequently, “Dharma” becomes synonymous with the Svabhāva (essential nature) of an entity, where the Svabhāva itself becomes its Dharma.
2. **Dharma as Cosmic Order or Ṛta:** In this context, “Dharma” represents the inherent natural law that governs the functioning of the cosmos. Its understanding as the “Moral Cosmic Order” finds its roots in the Ṛg Vedic concept of “Ṛta,” which emphasizes the unified order in both the physical and ethical realms. Dharma, in this sense, refers to the cosmic laws that are inherently ethical, moral, and just. It is of utmost importance for humanity to abide by these laws, not only to preserve oneself but also to ensure the well-being of others. Recognizing the interconnectedness of the cosmos, our own welfare is intricately tied to the welfare of all beings. Thus, Dharma serves as the foundation for cultivating values such as respect, care, sharing, and reverence, leading to the realization of our true selves. In essence, Dharma represents the universal order or law that governs the functioning of the cosmos.
3. **Dharma as Duty and Responsibility:** Dharma is also understood as “Duty,” a natural karma that must be fulfilled. In Indian culture, there was no need for formal documentation to bind individuals in

carrying out their duties. Duty is considered a natural expression of Dharma, rather than a forced obligation. Thus, various natural duties are recognized, such as Mātr̥dharma (mother's duty), Pit̥rdharma (father's duty), Ardhāṅginīdharma (wife's duty), Patidharma (husband's duty), Mānavdharma (human's duty) etc.

When a cow is welcomed into a household, it is regarded as a "Mother" who nurtures and is nurtured by the entire family. The family, including the "Mother Cow," lives together (Sahvāsa), works together (Sahkāra), and shares the fruits of their collective labor (Sahbhoga). As the Mother Cow fulfills her responsibilities towards the family, the family reciprocates by diligently performing their duties towards her. This interconnectedness, cooperation, and interdependence form the essence of "Dharma." Similarly, if it is the duty of a tree to provide shade, fruits, and medicinal benefits to all beings, it becomes the responsibility of humans to protect, nurture, and revere the tree. Thus, Dharma encompasses a natural sense of duty and responsibility.

In India, the emphasis has traditionally been on duties rather than rights. While rights imply a sense of entitlement, duties and responsibilities are approached with reverence. Therefore, it is crucial for humans to realize their inherent duties as "Dharma" towards themselves, their families, the environment, animals, the nation, and the cosmos. Dharma, in the context of duty and responsibility, plays a vital role in guiding ethical conduct. It refers to the moral responsibilities that individuals have based on their roles, relationships, and societal positions. Dharma as duty emphasizes the importance of fulfilling these responsibilities with integrity and righteousness, without seeking personal gain. It highlights the significance of acting in alignment with one's moral principles, promoting the welfare of others, and upholding justice and fairness. By adhering to Dharma as duty and responsibility, individuals contribute to a harmonious and just society, fostering overall well-being.

4. **Dharma as a Social Norm:** "Dharma" encompasses a comprehensive set of guidelines, including rules, regulations, and social, political, and environmental laws. These principles contribute to establishing a society that is rooted in moral, legal, customary, traditional, cultural, religious, and environmental order. As responsible

citizens, it is our duty to honor and abide by the rules set by our leaders, be it the king, Prime Minister, or President. Honesty towards our family, partners, nation, and all beings is an essential aspect of our Dharma. Additionally, our Dharma entails performing morning rituals, treating guests as divine beings, assisting the less fortunate, showing respect to animals, and recognizing nature as our nurturing Mother. By upholding these principles, “Dharma” serves as the social order that fosters harmony, peace, and joy in our society.

- 5. Dharma as Puruṣārtha:** Within this framework, Dharma represents the ultimate aim or pursuit of a human being, as well as all forms of life. Although the Puruṣārthas are primarily associated with human existence, the four goals of Dharma, Artha, Kāma, and Mokṣa can be applicable to all beings in the world. The first Puruṣārtha, Dharma, holds relevance for all forms of life. It is through Dharma that beings take birth as humans, dogs, trees, or rivers. Dharma bestows upon each being its inherent nature (Svabhāva) and assigns its role within the universal order.

The second Puruṣārtha, Artha, should not be narrowly understood as mere wealth or money. Instead, it encompasses all that nurtures, protects, and enables a being to fulfill and uphold its Dharma. For humans, this can superficially include the ability to procure material resources. Money helps sustain oneself, provide for the family, secure shelter, earn a livelihood, and fulfill one’s duties. However, for other beings like trees, Artha would encompass the land in which the seed is planted, the water, manure, and medicines that nourish and support its growth, enabling it to fulfill its Dharma. Similarly, for animals, Artha refers to nourishment, protection, and the ability to fulfill their respective Dharma.

The third Puruṣārtha, Kāma, pertains to the desires and aspirations of humans, encompassing mental, physical, and emotional realms. This aspect is not exclusive to humans but extends to all beings. Animals, plants, and birds not only require physical nourishment but also crave love, appreciation, and care. Even mountains and rivers require an equal amount of love and care. For animals like goats, dogs, or hens, food and shelter alone are insufficient; they also yearn for affection, companionship, and care, as they too strive for spiritual elevation.

Sir Jagdish Chandra Bose conducted pioneering research that demonstrated the existence of life and consciousness in plants. In his influential 1902 research paper titled “Responses in the Living and Non-Living,” he provided evidence to support his findings and said;

“Plants grow more quickly when exposed to nice music and gentle whispers, and poorly when exposed to harsh music and loud speech. They become depressed when exposed to polluted air and darkening skies. Plants could feel pleasure and they could feel pain.”<sup>4</sup>

“Mokṣa,” the fourth Puruṣārtha, represents the ultimate goal not only for humans but for all beings. Regardless of their diverse forms and names, all entities undergo the cycle of birth, death, and transmigration, progressing towards spiritual elevation with each incarnation. This universal pursuit of realizing the true “Self” has been acknowledged by numerous Rṣīs and Munis, who have recounted their past lives as animals, reptiles, and birds. Despite the different manifestations we assume throughout our journey, the attainment of self-realization remains our ultimate objective.

- 6. Dharma as Religion:** Dharma, as a religious concept, refers to the fundamental principles and practices that guide individuals on their spiritual path. It encompasses a wide range of beliefs, rituals, and moral teachings across various religious traditions. Dharma as religion provides individuals with a framework for understanding the nature of existence, the purpose of life, and the path to spiritual fulfillment. It emphasizes the importance of moral conduct, self-realization, and the pursuit of harmony with the divine or the ultimate reality. Dharma as religion offers a diverse array of spiritual practices and philosophies, enabling individuals to find meaning, purpose, and a connection to the transcendent within their respective religious contexts.

“Dharma” encompasses the concept of religion, such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and others. In India, religious practices serve as a means to embody and manifest philosophical wisdom. Religion in India not only encompasses philosophical systems but also extends to morality, ethics, spirituality, culture, and social norms. The

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<sup>4</sup> Pal Sanchari, J C Bose, *The Little Known Story of How India’s First Biophysicist Proved Plants Have Life*, The Better India, Bangalore, 2016.

interconnection between religion, philosophy, and life itself is deeply ingrained in the Indian context. This book specifically highlights the significance of the environment and animals, as they are considered integral to the essence of religion. Worshiping entities like cows, rivers, pīpala trees, Mother Earth, the five elements, and every aspect of the universe holds great importance within the Vedic religious framework.

7. **Dharma as Virtue:** In this perspective, “Dharma” is viewed as the pinnacle of virtue and moral excellence. It encompasses acts that reflect compassion, kindness, and selflessness towards all beings. Nurturing and feeding animals, tending to plants, providing medical aid to the injured, serving others with a sense of unity, helping without seeking personal gain, practicing truthfulness, honesty, kindness, and compassion are not only esteemed virtues but also represent the highest expressions of “Dharma.”

The above-mentioned interpretations of “Dharma” represent seven distinct connotations, but they do not exhaust its meaning.

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya defines “Dharma” as the observance of duties by individuals belonging to different Varnas (castes) and Āśramas (stages of life), which leads to both worldly prosperity (Abhyudaya) and spiritual liberation (Nisreyas). In this context, Dharma encompasses the cardinal virtues associated with various social roles and stages of life. It provides a framework for maintaining peace and abundance in society.

1. **Sādharanadharmā<sup>5</sup>:** The General Codes or Universal Duties encompass fundamental principles that are intended to be observed by all of humanity. These duties hold significance in various contexts, including ethical, moral, and environmental domains. They are as follows:
  - a) **Ahimsā or non-violence** denotes the principle of abstaining from causing harm in one’s thoughts, speech, and actions towards all living beings, encompassing humans, animals, plants, birds, and other sentient entities.

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<sup>5</sup>Manusmriti, v.10.63 (अहिंसा सत्यमस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः। एतं सामासिकं धर्मं चातुर्वर्ण्येऽब्रवीन्मनुः ॥ ahimsā satyamsteyam śaucamindriyanigreh|etaṁ sāmāsikam dharmā caturvarṇyebravinmnuḥ॥)