



A CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON CONCEPT OF DHARMA

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ABSTRACT:

Ancient Indian system revolves around the concept of Dharma. Dharma of any religion is in the form of personal and social behavioural rules in order to provide a safe and peaceful and protective coexistence of the human beings in the society. In the current paper, three of the prominent religions namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism are compared with respect to the concept of Dharma and its guiding rules for a peaceful coexistence in the society within the religious groups and with other religious groups.

KEYWORDS:

DHARMA, HINDU, BUDDHIST, SIKH, INSIGHTFUL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Dharma* plays an important cognitive and pragmatic position in Indian schools of thought. Its meaning is comprehensive in nature. The *dharma* may be a duty, order, virtue, righteousness, custom, religion, custom, religion and Justice. If individual wants to succeed in life and make his/her life peaceful and prosperous, s/he should follow *dharma*. Life without *dharma* is just like a fish which is out of water. In this present technology driven environment and economy driven environment, the role of *dharma* is highly significant. The sustainability of moral and ethical society, the sustainability of ecology and the sustainability of value oriented, human rights, and peace education are possible through *dharma* [1]. Our customs, habits, traditions, cultures, personality factors, intellectual development, moral judgement, social progress and emotional stabilities are influenced by *dharma* only. Now-a-days, many religions have been conflicting themselves regarding *dharma* in terms of duties, principles, orders, virtues, and righteousness. It is the high time to relook into the *dharma* that gives positive and desirable combinatorial inclinations as well as asymptotical insights on expected behaviours among various religious communities. It is necessary to compare *dharma* among different religions for reducing misconceptions. The present paper provides critical, reflective and normative observations on *dharma* in different religions specifically, for Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism through comparative analysis.

DHARMA IN HINDU RELIGION

The *dharma* is a significant concept in the Hindu view of life and it refers to the principle in social and personal life. It takes prominent place in the *Vedas* and the *Upanisads*. The meaning of *dharma* differs with regard to *Samhitas*, *Smritis*, *Brahmanas*, and *Puranas*. Basically, it is

constructed to sustain peace and harmony for egalitarian society. It promotes psychological stability and social equanimity. It is profound fact that the entire universe is sustained and protected by *dharma*. Stability and social harmony are strengthened through *dharma* only. It is a fundamental principle for arranging the entire universe systematically. It continues in all walks of life. It is said that those who protect *dharma* would be protected by *dharma* and those who do not protect *dharma* would not protected by *dharma* [2].

There are various facets of *dharma* in Hindu life such as *Sadharanadrana dharma* or *Manavadharma*, *Varnadharmas*, *Asramadharmas*, *Yugadharmas*, *Rajadharmas*, *Vastudharmas*, *Apaddharmas*, *Jaivadharmas* etc. In the great epic *Mahabharata*, *dharma* is classified into three facets such as *Desh dharma* (nation related), *Jati dharma* (race related) and *kula dharma* (caste related). In the *Bhagavadgita*, two forms of *dharma* are explored namely; *svadharmas* and *paradharmas*: ("*Svadharme nidhanam S'reyah paradharmas bhayavah'*") According to *Svadharmas*, one should do one's duty with one's own will, knowledge, skill and effort without depending upon others and without following others illogically. This kind of *Svadharmas* promotes prosperity within individual and society as well. If one can take actions in the absence of competence, required knowledge, and capacity to perform the action, this kind of phenomenon will be called as *Paradharmas*. If one takes action in the absence of required knowledge and capacity of particular action, one can face some sort of difficulties [3].

Manu has listed ten basic principles for morality. These ten basic principles are indispensable for leading individual life happily and peacefully in the society. These ten basic principles are: i) Steadfastness, ii) Forgiveness, iii) Endurance, iv) Non-stealing, v) Cleanliness, vi) Self-restraint. vii) Intellect, viii) Knowledge, ix) Truth and

x) Control of anger. (*"Dhrtih ksama damasteyam s'aucam indriyanigraha Dhirvidya sayam akrodho dasakam dharmalaksanam"*)[4].

Steadfastness refers to quality of man that paves the path for an action. This is a basic required quality for success. *Forgiveness* is another noble quality of man/woman. With forgiveness, one can provide an opportunity to an offender to transform himself/herself. According to the situations, it can be applied. But it should not be taking it for granted. *Endurance* helps to overcome great difficulties and also helps to align behaviour as per alternatives. *Non-stealing* demands not to possess things, which are not actually belong to one. If anyone desires to take things, they have to possess them through individual effort. *Cleanliness* reflects godliness. It generates very healthy and peaceful environment. Physical and psychological readiness can be cultivated through cleanliness. *Self-restraint* regulates sensory motor organs for not doing any undesirable activities. *Intellect* may help to react logically and insightfully in the social-cultural society. *Knowledge* may help to refine the behaviour in an expected manner. Truthfulness is the most basic quality which helps to cultivate faithfulness. Control of anger may help to think rationally and act and purposefully. Patanjali also directed individuals to look into truthfulness non-violence, non-stealing, non-receiving and continence are the five *yamas*[4].

As per *Varna Dharma*, there is four fold classification of society namely; *Brahmana*, *Ksatriya*, *Vais'ya* and *S'udra*. *Brahmanas* are needed to have qualities such as control of internal organs, knowledge, purity and wisdom. They are the models for the society. They should follow as per *dharma*. *Ksatriyas* are needed to have qualities like heroism, boldness and thirst for victory. They need physical strength rather than brain. *Vais'yas* are needed to carry out trade and commerce. They have to exhibit skills in material transaction or business. *S'udras* are the supportive system for survival and comfort of the other three classes of people such as *Brahmanas*, *Ksatriyas* and *Vais'yas*.

As per *As'rama dharma*, the span of life the individual has been divided into four successive stages namely; *Brahmacarya* (celibacy), *Garhasthya* (householdership), *Vanaprastka* (forest dwellership) and *Sannyasa* (stage of renunciation). In *Varnadharmas* and *As'ramadharmas*, *dharma* is moral imperative in nature. In *Varnadharmas*, *dharma* is determined by one's own nature in the light of capacity, whereas in *As'ramadharmas*, one's duty is followed from one stage of life to another stage of life. Everyone has to pass through these four successive stages [5]-[6].

DHARMA IN BUDDHIST RELIGION

Buddhist dharma can be analyzed through teachings of Buddha. Teachings of Buddha can be retrieved from the '*tripitakas*' means 'three baskets of teachings'. The three domains of teachings are: 1) *Vinayapitaka* 2) *Suttapitaka* and 3) *Abhidhammapitaka*. The *Vinayapitaka* elucidates

about rules of '*Sangha*' (society). The *Suttapitaka* enumerates Buddha's sermons and dialogues and *Abhidhammapitaka* follows expositions of theories philosophically. These three books are the basic sources of *Buddhist Philosophy* as well as *Buddhist Dharma* and these books are written in Pali language. The Buddha has listed four noble truths which are called '*Chatvari Arya Satyani*'. The four noble truths are: i) Life of the external world is full of suffering (*Sarvam Dukhamasti*); ii) There is a cause for the suffering (*Dukha Samudaya*); iii) It is possible to remove the suffering (*Dukha Nirodha*); iv) There is a path for removal of the suffering (*Dukha Nirodha Marga*) [7]-[8].

The first noble truth '*Sarvam Dukhamasti*' is accepted by all Indian schools of thought except charvakas. From the analysis, it is clear that the pleasures that are connected to life are momentary. But every one may suffer through disease, injury, old age, disorder etc. the second noble truth '*Dukha Samudaya*' tells that there is a chain of 12 links as the cause of suffering. Buddha has explained the concept of natural causations called as '*Pratityasamutpada*'. Buddha tells that suffering is conditional and suffering comes due to birth, birth occurs due to will, will generates due to mental clinging, mental clinging happens due to thirst, thirst arises due to sensory experiences, sensory experience comes due to sense-object contact, sense-object contact occurs due to sense organs, sense organs form due to embryonic organum, embryonic organum evolves due to initial consciousness, initial consciousness occurs due to impression of the past experience which is due to ignorance of truth. This phenomenon is the chain of 12 links as the cause of suffering. These 12 links are not always similar in all the sermons. But majority believes them as fall. As per third noble truth '*Dukha Nirodha*', the suffering can be ended if conditions are removed. The fourth noble truth '*Astanga Marga*' provides path for liberation called nirvana. *Astanga Marga* is eight fold path for nirvana (liberation) [9]

They are: 1) *Samyagdrshiti*, 2) *Samyagsankalpa*, 3) *Samyagvak* 4) *Samyakarmanta*, 5) *Samyagajiva*, 6) *Samyagvyayama*, 7) *Samyag smriti* and 8) *Samyag Samadhi*

1. *Right views (Samyagdrshiti)*: Wrong views on self and the world give a kind of suffering. It is modification of behaviour morally will provide an opportunity to acquire right views. Right views give right knowledge about the four noble truths.

2. *Right Resolve (Samyagsankalpa)*: Just by knowing the truth in terms of knowledge, does not provide any fruitful results, the real resolution on reforming life is important. For this, the moral aspirant has to abandon ill thoughts on others and stay away from the harmful activities. This kind of behaviour gradually leads to right determination.

3. *Right Speech (Samyagvak)*: Right determination looks into right speech. Every word must be pleasant, moral, positive and thoughtful.

4. *Right Conduct (Samyakarmanta)*: Right speech is needed to be followed by right action. The right conduct should

follow *panca silas* (five vows). Moral aspirant should refrain from a) sensuality b) stealing c) killing d) telling lie and e) intoxication.

5. *Right livelihood (Samyagajiva)*: One should earn honestly for one's survival. One should maintain one's life peacefully.

6. *Right Effort (Samyagvyayama)*: Everyone has to follow consistent, constant and continues effort to remove old evil thoughts completely and fight against new evil thoughts. The mind keeps on inviting many thoughts. One should continuously put efforts to fill the mind with positive thoughts.

7. *Right Mindfulness (Samyag smriti)*: This follows alert and attentiveness. One should relook thoughtfully about previous learnt experiences and continue on right path.

8. *Right Concentration (Samyag Samadhi)*: It looks into reasoning and investigation regarding truth. It follows *dhyana* or *Jhana*. The stage that allows no pain and no ease is called *nirvana*. This kind of situation is called *prajna* or absolute wisdom.

As per *Buddhist dharma*, all physical or mental events are conditioned by law of universal causation which is known as *dharma*. Everything happens due to *dharma*. Nothing happens without *dharma*. Buddha does not accept that some reality externally exists with independence and unconditionality. Buddha believes theory of karma. The present individual status is determined by the *past karma* and future individual status will be determined by *present karma*. *Karma* is the major factor for your existence and destiny. Buddha also believes the doctrine of universal change and impermanence. If everything is leading something else then everything is constantly changing. Hence, everything is constant flex. It means everything is impermanent or *kshnika*. Since everything is generating from some conditions, everything will be disappeared if those conditions are disappeared. In general, individual is composed of five elements namely; i) Form (*Rupa*), ii) Feelings (*Vedana*) iii) Perception (*Sanjna*) iv) Predisposition (*Samskara*) and v) Consciousness (*Vijnana*) [10]-[11].

DHARMA IN SIKH RELIGION

Sikh Dharma is considered as the youngest of the global religions. The Dharma of Sikhism is associated with way of living and it is set of moral, ethical, and spiritual guidelines that emphasize the individual to focus on knowledge as well as truth. The *Sikh dharma* was derived from the Punjab region of North India. Guru Nanak initially coined *Sikh dharma* for providing divinely life for Sikhs. He identified himself as a man of non-religion respecting all religions equally. He has a strong faith that God is one with multiple paths truth is a label for the God. The followers of Guru Nanak are always truth seekers. They always believe in light of truth and also believe the guru who has direct consciousness of god. They strongly believe that guru is a remover of ignorance and propagator of knowledge besides guru is the experience of god. Many times, Guru

Nanak opposed social injustice, superstition and suppression and inspired his followers through singing songs with divinity. The collection of such divinely inspired songs is treated as *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*. The Sikh philosophy can be seen in *Guru Granth Sahib* which is inclusion of deed, action, and consequence. Sikh life is always purposeful and has been reflecting the shared pragmatic communal experience and idealistic involvement. For Sikhs, *The Guru Granth Sahib* is a repository of ethical and spiritual knowledge and wisdom related to life. As per *Guru Granth Sahi*, "Greater than Truth is Truthful Living" (p. 62)[12].

Guru Nanak stresses that work is the basic tool to produce desired outcome. The people have right to work. God has created every one capable of doing work. Hence, everyone should work for earning in positive direction. God Himself has assigned certain occupation to everyone in this Universe. According to Guru Nanak, if someone is unable to do any work or has not got any employment, it is duty of others to look after him/her. For this purpose, the system of '*dasvand*' was started. Guru Nanak has formulated three golden principles: 1) Kirat Karna, 2) Nam Japana, and 3)Wand Chhakna, according to these three golden principles, humans should earn wealth for survival through honest and creative labour, s/he needs always keep in mind the name of God and s/he should share earnings of labour with her/his fellow beings. He instructed and motivated his followers to earn and give something out of earning to the needy. This kind of behaviour gradually leads to ideal and peaceful life. Guru Nanak adds that good human being must live honestly and truthfully, should fight against injustice and should cultivate compassion for humanity and it is the responsibility of the ruler to provide food and clothes for the needy. He encouraged his followers to follow 'Naam Daan Ishanan'. *Nam* refers to remembering God constantly, *Daan* refers to charity or altruistic deeds, and *Ishnan* stands for purity of body and mind through moral conduct.

In *Sikh dharma*, a well constructed family life along with spirituality and peaceful society are encouraged. Sikhs believe that salvation can be achieved with purity of mind. No need to be celibate and no need to be deviated from the external world for achieving salvation. Being a soldier, monk, and scholar, every individual may attain salvation. Every individual has to abandon five cardinal vices for leading peaceful life. These five cardinal vices are; *Lust (Kam)*, *Anger (Krodh)*, *Greed (Lobh)*, *Worldly Attachment (Moh)*, and *Pride (Ahankar)*. These five undesirable qualities are obstacles for realizing the god. These may destroy the peaceful life and cannot pave the way for salvation. The ultimate purpose of the Sikh tradition is to seek god and always be associated with Him. Human life is an opportunity given by the god for attaining the divine goal. If divine goal is not achieved, individual may fall into the cycle of birth and rebirth [13]-[15].

For achieving purposeful and peaceful life, the last Sikh human guru called Guru Gobind Singh, introduced *Khalsa*,

which is Guru Panth or Army of all initiated Sikhs a spiritual community of women and men completely connected to purity of knowing and doing. It is necessary for spiritual community to follow five K's namely; *Kesh, Kangha, Katchera, Kara* and *Kirpan*; i) *Kesh*: The spiritual community should not cut hair and beard because kesh is a gift given by god. This is a crown of spirituality and helps to sustain a higher consciousness. ii) *Kangha*: It is a symbol for cleanliness. It is a wooden comb to groom the hair properly. It symbolizes cleanliness is godliness. iii) *Kachera*: It symbolizes purity. It is specially designed underwear which is made of cotton. It resembles commitment of purity. iv) *Kara*: It symbolizes attachment with truth and divine liberty. It is a steel circle that is worn on wrist of the individual. v) *Kirpan*: It symbolizes that *Khalsa* has commitment in searching for truth. It refers to sword which helps in defending the fine line of truth. *Khalsa* vow to avoid smoking alcohol, intoxicants sexual relationships outside of marriage. *Male Khalsa* is honored with *Singh* (Lion) and *Female Khalsa* is honoured with *kaur* (Princess). *Khalsa* may be a scholar, soldier and saint. *Khalsa* should live with high morals and excellent character. *Male Khalsa or Female Khalsa is wise, strong and learned. Khalsa follow five virtues namely* courage, charity, cleanliness, sacrifice and honesty. Code of conduct is iconic virtue in *Khalsa* [16].

Sikhism stresses upon dharma connecting to protection of Human Rights. Guru Nanak has emphasized on the protection and preservation of Human Rights. He mobilized the people to modify their behaviour by eradicating religious repression, exploitation of women, social injustice, inequality, and degradation of human values. He has reflected that the Human Rights can be strengthened by removing horrible, repressive and violent situations. He has felt that certain vices like hatred, deception, dishonesty, degradation and exploitation are creating undesirable atmosphere in the society. People need to think of establishment of proper political, economic and social system in the light salvation. Self respect, dignity and honour are core qualities of meaningful life. Everyone has the right to seek and pursue self fulfillment and happiness. The law of social harmony and social coherence lies in the love and persuasion.

CONCLUSION

Everyone needs to think of establishment of proper political, economic and social system in the light of *dharma*. Self-esteem, self-efficacy, efficiency, effectiveness can be enhanced by following *dharma*. Dignity, discipline, dedication, and devotion are cultivated through comparative analysis of *dharma* in different religions only. In the light of *dharma*, everyone has the right to seek and pursue self fulfillment and happiness. The law of social harmony and social coherence lies in *dharma*. The three religions kept *dharma* at pivotal position in their ideology. Dharma is meant for enhancement of Righteousness and ethics. It explains what to do and what not to do for attaining peace at individual, social and universal level.

All the three religions are associated with fraternity,

benevolence, charity, discipline, strict austerity (limited desires), duty mindedness, friendliness, mercifulness and reverence with regard to dharma. Dharma is necessary in all times, in all ages, and in all generations. Inter generational equity and intra generational equity can be enhanced through *dharma*. We all know that all our pursuits are designed to enhance the peaceful living of the mankind. As Dharma was preached and followed by all religions, they are still in existence.

Dharma is not confined to one religion. It is necessary for all religions, at all the times, and for all the people, as it was aptly superscribed in Gita, 'Dharmo Rakshita, Rakshitaah' which means if you follow Dharma (righteousness, ethical values or moral values), it will protect you ultimately. In this present technology driven environment and economy driven environment, the role of *dharma* is highly indispensable.

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