

THE NATURE AND CLASSIFICATIONS OF DHARMA

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Abstract-

In Hinduism *puruṣārtha*, denotes cardinal values for every human society. Those are four in number, viz, *dharma*, *artha kama* and *mokṣa*. Among these *dharma* is believed to be the center of all. *Dharma* implies a set of cardinal values which sustain human society. Thus it has been said, *dharmo dhāryate prajā*. This *dharma* has been delineated primarily in various scripts of ancient Indian literature. Thus an endeavor has been made in this paper to present the central idea of *dharma* as presented in the Hindu texts along with mention of its different dimensions.

Key words- *vastu dharma*, *jaivdharma*, *varna dharma*, *asrama dhrama* and *mānava dharma*

Etymologically, *dharma* is derived from the root ‘*dhr*’ which means to ‘uphold’ or ‘support’. The path of *dharma* is nothing but the pursuit of basic values such as love, service, sacrifice, tolerance, forgiveness, empathy, etc. The religious modes of life prescribed by a religious denomination, are directed to help the individuals to live value-centric life. Bereft of values, social order is bound to disintegrate as it would witness the conflict of selfish interests leading to dissension and discord. Human society does not consist of merely being together but living together with a shared sense of goal and value-systems. These fundamental values are always of contemporary relevance because they lend stability to a social system where peopling with diverse aptitudes, attitudes, ability, and achievements live together. In this sense, *dharma* is a pragmatic necessity in so far as it ensures harmony, peace in the social body. *Dharma* is nothing but righteous action on the part of individuals. When there is the decadence of righteousness (*dharma*) society is pushed to be the brink of ruin. Indian philosophy not only espouses *dharma* as the preponderant principle of the universe but defines it in terms of the ‘ought’ and ‘ought not’ which is explicitly articulated in the concept of *vastu dharma*, *jaivdharma*, *varna dharma* , *asrama dhrama* and *mānava dharma*

VASTU DHARMA

'Dharma' is the inalienable property of the subject. Devoid of the essential property i.e. *dharma*, a thing ceases to be what it is. The *dharma* of water is to flow downward and maintain its level and *dharma* of air is to flow to vacuum maintains its level. Water and air retain its *dharma* everywhere and always. Similarly, *dharma* of fire is to burn, to produce heat. Bereft of its thermal property and capacity to burn, it ceases to be fire. Every object in this world, has its attributive essence which determines its nature and role in relation to itself and others. Knowledge of *vāstu dharma* facilitates man to manipulate and harness the forces of nature to his convenience and predict the course of quality. This lends him returns over other living counterparts. In the hierarchy of creation, living species takes up upper position than the world of matter. Plants, trees, vines, creepers, etc. are immobile. Though immobile, they are born, mature, spread their species and go out of existence. The mobile species like viruses, bacteria, insects, reptiles, birds, and animals are capable of locomotion. Each one of the species has its characteristic essence *dharma*. The ducks, pigeons, crows remain from one other on account of the characteristic nature which is peculiar to a given species. There is also distinctive properties-(*dharma*), peculiar to all living species that are mobile.

JAIVA DHARMA

Laugh, cry hunger, sleep, sex, fear, bravo etc. are the characteristic peculiarities of living being-*jiva*. Even human-beings, who stand distinguished from the other mobile species, share these characteristics with other living beings. The same principle which resides in 'matter' also populates all living species. Matter and life signify various degrees in which the central rule conveys itself. Mind occupies still a higher state than matter and life. The matter is concerned as out and out bodily because consciousness remains so inactive within it that it appears as non-existent. The same code is articulated as life-phenomena such as birth, growth, decay, and extinction in the living species. The conscious principle is supplementary unambiguously manifested as a mind in human beings. The mind has the capacity for self-consciousness, and self-determination. Matter, mind, and consciousness reveal a range. Minor grows into the major, driven by the compulsions of the immanent principle. The existence of Non-human beings is more corporeal and clairvoyant whereas human existence is more mental than physical.

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VARNA DHARMA

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Varna literally means the ‘colour’. Here, it means the unique nature of the individual determined by one’s *karma* in the past. Each individual is unique in respect of the innate disposition and ability *svabhāva*). one’s duty (*svadharma*) according to one’s *svabhāva*. It undertakes four-fold classification of human-beings according to their *svabhāva* namely; *Vipra*, *Ksetriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sūdra*. The *dharma* of each category of individuals is determined by their characteristic nature. *Vipras* are pre-eminently inclined to the path of enlightenment. Hence, they are to play the role of goal setters and guide for the humanity. *Ksetriyas* by nature are prone to the path of valour. Hence, it becomes their bounden duty to extend security to people and society, at large, against the onslaught of evil forces. *Vaisyas* are those who possess worldly wisdom. Hence, it is their moral obligation to undertake trade and commerce which would sustain a society in the physical plane. *Sūdras* are those who do not possess any of the qualities of other *dharmas* in particular but are pre-eminently disposed to love and serve. Society requires the services of all these four *varnas* for its holistic growth. The social good can be optimized only when people belonging to each *varna* perform their *svadharma*. *Svadharma* is determined by *svabhāva*. The Bhagavad Gita cautions that social equilibrium is disturbed when people belonging to one *dharma* tend to appropriate *dharma* of others (*paradharma*). The cause of collective well-being (*lokasamgraha*) is best addressed only when people perform *svadharma*. *Dharma* in the Bhagavad Gita is also used in the sense of characteristic natures of the species across different categories. The life of the non-humans is characterized by instinctive urges and necessities such as the desire for food, sleep, sense of insecurity, and libidinal urges. Though human-beings share these characteristics with non-humans what distinguishes them from the rest of the living species is their awareness of *dharma* and capacity of to follow the path of *dharma*. Hence, the *svadharma* of man consists in overcoming the push and pull of the animal propensities and follow the path of righteousness. If perchance, people, by and large, take to the *dharma* of the animals which is their *paradharma*. They are bound to court greater ruin not only for themselves but also the society, at large. Collective interest should take precedence over individual interest or selfish interest. Hence, it is said; “*Svadhane nidhanam sreya paradharma bhayabaha*

ĀŚRAMA DHARMA-

Varnadharma determines one’s duty in a given existential situation whereas as *āśrama dharma* defines one’s duty according to the stages of life that one lives through. *āśrama* is the stage of life that one remains poised in. There are four *āśramas* namely; *Brahmacharya*, that of celibate who is supposed to

cultivate the qualities of head and heart by following the principles of the physical and psychic discipline. With the passage of time as one grows from one *āśrama* to another one has to ascertain one's duty i.e. *āśrama dharma* and remain non-compromisingly strict in the practice of *āśrama dharma*, *Grahyastha* is the stage of householder when one is supposed to discharge one's obligation for the immediate family one is born into or the family raised by oneself, *Vanaprastha* is the stage when one retires into a state of the related contemplative life, having discharged one's onerous worldly obligations. The stage of *Sanyasa* is that of renunciate when one is supposed to remain wedded to the path of complete detachment and given wholly to the pursuit of the highest goal i.e. *mokṣa*. *Varna dharma* is person-specific whereas *ashrama dharma* is a station (stage of life) specific.

Mānava dharma

Unlike non-human beings, human beings possesses the sense of 'ends' and 'means', 'ought' and 'non-ought', and the ability to choose. If *dharma* stands for the characteristic essence, then human beings should have their *dharma*—*mānava dharma*. Man's *dharma* must be such that it remains not only uncommon to human beings but, is to be found in every person, irrespective of age, sex, education, profession, race, ethnic group, nationality, etc. In the other side, in every individual *mānava dharma* should defines the uniqueness of human species, in terms of common, collective, universal and essential property. *Mānava dharma* is not to define *apriority*. It is to be exposed. Intimate reflection on the nature of human thinking, disposition and conduct and manner creates it amply evident that every person, irrespective of time and clime, race and language, age and sex, seeks immense and infinite bliss. By nature man is bliss seeker. For this nature human being is distinguished from rest of living beings in world. Like non-human beings, human being run after the pleasurable and circumvents the painful deeds. All living beings seek pleasure and avoid pain. But, unlike other living counterparts, man doesn't rest content with finite pleasure. The desire for bliss is insatiable of man. The more one has, the more one desires. The desire for 'pleasurable' in non-human beings, seems from their physical demands. The desire for 'pleasurable' in non-human beings stems for their needs. Such instinctive desires have their complete sensation. They do not want pleasure beyond their necessity. But the desire for pleasure never reaches a point of final sensation in human beings. This is so because man, consciously or unconsciously, desires a type of pleasure which doesn't come to an end. This type of 'Pleasure' is limited and punctuated with pain. Man desires pleasure which is infinite and unpunctuated with pain. Infinite pleasure is called bliss (*ānanda*). This

explains the perennial discontentment of man with whatever he is or has. Nothing less than the 'infinite pleasure' can set at rest the irresistible craving for 'more' and 'still more'. Infinite pleasure's desire cannot be satiated by a predetermined or finite object. A finite object, cannot, on principle, yield infinite pleasure i.e. bliss. Ideally, it is only infinite which can set at rest, the craving for 'bliss'. The infinite insatiable of man is nothing but the craving for 'infinite' in disguise. Thus, seeking bliss-*ānanda* is the essential wont-*dharma* of man. The means by which bliss can be attained is *dharma sādhanā* or *dharmācaraṇ*.

The basic want of human being is to seek the infinite-*annata*, God-*bhagavān*. Therefore, it is rightly termed as *bhagavad dharma*. It is nothing but the ability to discriminate between righteousness (*dharma*) and the unrighteousness –*adharma* and the ability to follow the path of excellence (*pustimarga*). *Dharma* is four- pronged-*chatuspat*. The practice of *dharma* has its four fold expressions in form of *vistāra*-expansion, *rasa*-psychic flow, *sevā*-service, *tadsthiti*-cosmic stance. *Vistāra* is continues explanation of mind, it results in progressive dilation of the psychic wave (perceptible in the EEG screen). Longer the wavelength, subtler is the mind. As a result of progressive expansion, the baser propensities lose their hold on the mind. The mind becomes increasingly freed from the fetters of '*prakṛti*'. The sense of 'I' and 'mine' builds room for increasing identification with others. *Egotism*—selfishness gets eclipsed in empathy. Everyone is unique in respect of his mind i.e. the means one thinks feels and acts. In other words, every person moves about in the world with his characteristic mental flow-*svarasa*. Every being, living and nonliving, move around the '*param puraṣa*' who resides in the cosmic center. As one progresses on the way of *dharma sadhāna*, the radius between the cosmic center and the center of the unit gradually decreases. The main aim of life is to convert one's mental flow-*svarasa* to the cosmic flow-*paramarasa*. So, '*dharma sadhanā*' is a nickname of '*rasa sadhanā*.' Because of '*vistāra*' there is increasing identification with the world around. All particulars are seen as the manifestation of God, an absolute family member. Then, one feels the love as an irresistible instinct. Love generates concern, expressing itself in form of *sevā*. *Sevā* is the inevitable expression of love, *sevā* is unilateral, therefore, awaits no return. *Sevā* is different from *vyavasāya*—commerce where something is given in exchange of something else. *Sevā* is too given for its own sake. It is spontaneous band unconditional. One who is wedded to *dharma* cannot but love and serve everyone with the identification of *parama pruṣa*. Cosmic stance—*Tadsthiti* is the utmost end which every created particular seeks to attain. The practice of '*dharma*' finds its culmination in the realization of the cosmic stance where the unit self—*anu* becomes one with the cosmic self—*bhumā*.

Dharma's practice results in continual expression—*vistāra* of the human mind. Conversely, karma or pursuit which constricts the human mind and degenerates the human mind is contrary to the principle of '*mānavdharma*'-'*bhagava dharma*.' The progressive expansion of human consciousness results in increasing the identification of the person with the creation. Eventually, the individual identifies himself with the whole creation and declares that everything is *Brahman- Sarvam Khulumidam Brahman*-God is everywhere. Brahman finds Himself in everything else and every other thing in Himself. This is the state of cosmic stance when one is established in the realization that 'I am 'in the cosmos' and the cosmos is in me.' Ontologically, this is the state of the final merger—the yoga of the unit-self with the cosmic –self. *Mānav dharma* or '*bhagavad dharma*' which manifests in form of persistent quest for infinite pleasure (bliss) finds its consummation on the attainment of the highest state which is of the nature of –*Sat, Cit and ānanda* .

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