

## Dharmic democracy in India

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### Abstract

Dharma is a concept of central importance in Indian philosophy and religion and has multiple meanings and interpretations in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. With changing world order it is evident that the world has been fractured into separate blocks. On one hand, we have autocrats ruling their countries with complete control of the state, media and economy while on the other hand, we have democratic nations having guarantee of liberty and freedom to their people. India in international politics has mainly maintained a neutral stand and this stand can be understood from a view that India has a deep unique dharmic democracy and through this article we will try to analyze it.

**Keywords:** Raj dharma; Ahimsa; Pluralism; Karma; Diversity; Dharma

### 1. Introduction

The term dharma does not mean religion, it simply means duty. There are several terms like darshana, mata and agama – perspective, opinions and paths- such as Vedanta, Mimamsa, Buddhism, Jainism , Yoga etc. which deals with philosophical questions relating to self and the world wholesome philosophies talked about gods and deities while others did not .If we talk about Hinduism in the modern times its really a modern day invention of colonial power who mapped the world into identities like Hinduism (India), Islam (Middle East) and Confucianism (China), which we seemed to have bought into this false map of the world and in the name of national identity, drained ourselves of the rich diversity of alternative world-views (Banerjee, 2019)<sup>1</sup>.Dharma encompasses ideas like rights, duties, custom, religion, character which is considered morally and appropriately correct ( Heesterman, 1978)<sup>1</sup>.



**Figure 1** The wheel in the centre of India's flag symbolizes Dharma

Democratic system has emerged after several years of experimentation of different governance arrangements. Well functioning democratic systems have four core principles: Rule of law; equality before law; separation of power between

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executive, legislature and executive for checks and balances and accountability to its people. The interlocking nature of these principles assures liberty, equality and fraternity. In this article we will try to understand this aspect how the democratic principles has always been part of India (Jayant, 2022)<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Dharmic democracy in India

Dharma is a key concept with multiple meanings but it is commonly interpreted as "religious and moral duties", "righteousness" "merit" which is governing the individual conduct.

In Hinduism, dharma includes rights, duties, conduct, virtues and right way of living. In Hinduism dharma refers to various aspects: Sanatana Dharma, Sadharana Dharma, Yuga Dharma, Sav Dharma.

In Sikhism it means proper religious practice and one's moral duties towards god. Guru Granth Sahib refers dharma to duty and moral value.



**Figure 3** Sikhism

In Jainism refers to teaching of Tirthankara and doctrine pertaining to moral and purification of human beings. Major Jain text, Tattvarta Sutra refers to righteous virtues: straightforwardness, modesty, truthfulness, non-attachment, austerity, celibacy, purity and self-restrain.



**Figure 4** The official symbol of Jainism, known as the Jain Prateek Chihna



**Figure 5** Duties, such as learning from teachers

Dharma in Buddhism is expressed in the teachings of Lord Buddha and means “cosmic law and order”.

Indian democratic system is founded on its own ancient beliefs and has not been founded on Western thought. We will try to analyze this by looking in history:

- The Rig –Veda defined the geographical existence of Bharatavarsha as well as SaptaSindhu, a land encompassing seven principle rivers. The Vishnu Purana described the geographical location of Bharatavarsha. Composed in the 2nd century BC, it says that the land that lies to the north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bharat(DhulipudiPandit, 2022) .
- ChanakyaArthashastra which states “The happiness of its ruler lies in the happiness of its subject” which means that it’s not what the ruler likes a matter, but only what people like”.
- Ambedkar declares “Let no one say that I have borrowed my philosophy from French revolution. I have not. My philosophy has roots of religion and not political science and this I have derived from my Master, The Buddha.”
- Mahatma Gandhi elaborates in Ram Rajya “The ideal of Ram Rajya is true democracy in which citizen can be sure of swift justice without any costly and elaborate procedure”.
- Ahmisa is connected to western concept of liberty as it means giving everyone the freedom to live and worship as they want. Ahmisa is non violence and it states that taking away someone freedom is a violent act and therefore against the ahmisa principle.
- India civilization is based on freedom of thought and belief system making it a unique civilization. As Rig Veda states “ ekam sat viprabahudhavadanti” which means there is one truth, sages call it by several names. This is interpreted as every individual is free to pursue eternal truth in their own way- where these choices shape their karma and led to their moksa; every person has to seek their own salvation.
- Our commitment to Raj Dharma which defines commitment to rule of law, no matter how rich or poor, strong or weak, we all enjoined to follow Raj dharma. Our constitution various laws and regulations settled case laws define Raj Dharma.
- The Bhagavad Gita explains how interrogate their duties, rights and free will and then decide their conduct. This has led to India celebrate its pluralism and democracy.
- Indian society has believed in separation of powers as in ancient Indian states kingdoms were ruled by monarchs however the rulers relied on the nobles to validate and approve their decisions. History reflects that most of the northern states had republican states for the entire Buddhist states. Priests also had significant influence on conduct and decisions of monarchs throughout the Indian history. Thus checks and balances were introduced through assemblies and priestly powers (Sinha, 2022) .Transparency and accountability are hallmarks of democratic systems.
- In MundakaJayate has always emphasized the importance of truth “ SatyamevaJayate- truth alone triumphs”. Dharma requires truth and not propaganda. In our constitution it is enforced through legislature, elections and media. We also believe in nature- centric paradigm.

We believe that human beings are part of cosmos, where every other living or non living thing has equal space, and a function that has been created for them. (Lord Buddha)

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### 3. Conclusion

The importance of dharma to Indian civilization is illustrated by Indian decision in 1947 to include the Ashoka Chakra as central motif on its flag as a depiction of dharmachakra. India’s contribution to multiculturalism and cultural pluralism is extra-ordinary important and this is why we have the world centric paradigm of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam against the state centric paradigm. This is our civilization, we never colonized anybody: Indian civilization is something that celebrates development, democracy, difference, diversity and dissent. Thus our civilization heritage guides us to humanitarian ethos and that’s why we are dharmic democracy.

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### Compliance with ethical standards

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