

VEDIC TRADITION AND THE FORMATION OF INDIAN CIVILIZATIONAL THOUGHT: FROM COSMIC ORDER TO DHARMA



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Abstract. This article analyzes the formation of Vedic writing and its influence on the subsequent development of Indian civilization, as well as how the Vedas, written in Sanskrit, contributed to the strengthening and development of traditional and cultural relations. Furthermore, it emphasizes the philosophical influence of the Vedas on the consciousness of the people of the Indian subcontinent through the concepts of dharma and rta. The study demonstrates how these texts shaped social roles and moral attitudes within the development of social relations, laying the foundations for enduring cultural norms.

Keywords. Vedas, tradition, Vedic Sanskrit, Indian civilization, dharma, Bhagavad-Gita, cosmic order

The emergence of civilization in India has a long and profound history, having formed an extensive culture, traditions, and symbolism of the countries of India. In the process of forming civilizational relations in the Indus Valley, written texts played an important role — the Vedas, which included ancient Indian sacred texts in Sanskrit. The Vedas, consisting of a corpus of sacred texts, performed such functions as the preservation of cosmic and social order.¹ Based on the fact that during the period of the formation of Vedic texts humanity was at the stage of the emergence of civilization, the main occupation of the population of the Indus Valley was agriculture, and this was directly reflected in the Vedas. Within the consciousness of the people of the Indus Valley, agriculture was not merely an economic activity but an act of a great cosmic order.²

¹ [Agriculture in ancient India](#)

² [AGRICULTURE IN VEDIC INDIA: SOME BASIC FACTS](#) | Naulakha | Global Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

The fundamental and basic formation of the Vedas is the idea of cosmic order. This idea includes such notions as balance between individual elements of integral life — the sun rises on time; here the sun is part of a large cycle, whose function is to form the idea of regularity within the structure of the world, and the ultimate function of order is the idea of the supreme order (ṛta).³ According to the ancient Vedas, the supreme order is an idea that states that between the individual and society there exists a higher law that is not a product of human labor and has no direct connection with power, while clearly adhering to a dualistic concept by defining what is right and what is not. In other words, this points to clear binary oppositions whose origins derive from ancient Indian texts.⁴

Human actions also play a special role in the formation of cosmic order. Human actions are viewed not as autonomous but as instruments that either destroy or create the harmony of the world. From this follows the main logic within Vedic consciousness — the result of human efforts does not hold primary significance; rather, the correctness of action is the highest value. This is explained by the fact that any efforts demonstrated by a person end with the formation of either a destructive or a constructive world, while what matters is the manner in which a person forms this reality within the framework of the concept of predestination.⁵ This logic differs radically from those models of consciousness that were characteristic of the Western philosophical tradition.⁶

As noted above, the primary emphasis in the Vedic tradition is on human action and the process of maintaining the harmony of the world. Here the most important concept is dharma — a set of norms and duties of a person determined by their position in society.⁷ It should be particularly emphasized that with the emergence of dharma, Vedic philosophy became more concrete. Prior to the emergence of this concept, the norms of the Vedic tradition were considered abstract and did not demonstrate an inclination toward contextual thinking. With the arrival of the new philosophical and traditional postulate of dharma, Indian culture, adapting to situational concepts, began to reject rigid ideological dogmas, reducing the level of confrontation in the perception of this concept, while nevertheless intensifying contradictions and disagreements between two ideological and philosophical notions.

³ [Rta ऋत्, the Great Vedic Cosmic Order | American Institute of Vedic Studies](#)

⁴ [The Bhagavad Gita on Performing Thy Task in Life | Life Worth Living | Yale Center for Faith & Culture](#)

⁵ Frazier, Jessica. 2021. "Ethics in Classical Hindu Philosophy: Provinces of Consequence, Agency, and Value in the Bhagavad Gītā and Other Epic and Śāstric Texts" *Religions* 12, no. 11: 1029. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12111029>

⁶ [34.pdf](#)

⁷ [IXAPMA](#)

The central concept of dharma is the determination of the correctness of action through time, circumstances, and specific situations, which indicates the formation of a way of life in a particular concrete situation. The process of decision-making is fundamentally based on defined roles and situations, rejecting the rules of absolute morality. Through analysis, it can be identified that the Vedic tradition, like the Western model, had its own strategy for structuring society by dividing it into specific categories:

- Brahmins — knowledge, rituals
- Kshatriyas — protection, warfare
- Vaishyas — trade, agriculture
- Shudras — service⁸

For example, one may consider the Kshatriyas: their purpose is predetermined by the cosmic order, and based on the established dharma, the Kshatriya conducts their life accordingly.

This traditional philosophy is vividly reflected in the epics and literature of the Vedas, one of the key examples being the Mahabharata, which was formed as an epic, a philosophical treatise, and a religious text. Its central event is the historical process of the struggle between two ancient clans — the Pandavas and the Kauravas. In this treatise, the issue of personal morality in relation to social duty is raised. The main hero, Arjuna, always faces two choices: either to follow the principles of inner morality or to fulfill his cosmic duty (ṛta). He initially refuses to fight, denying any justification for entering battle; however, his duty (dharma) compels him to fight. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna instructs Arjuna, stating: “It is better to perform one’s own dharma imperfectly than another’s perfectly.”⁹

Understanding Vedic texts is an important component for comprehending Indian thought and Indian culture. Without detailed study of ancient pre-civilizational and post-civilizational social relations, it is difficult to predict the contemporary anthropological and sociological structure, as well as the modern culture and mindset of the people. The concept of dharma demonstrates the path traversed by Indian civilization, from the earliest paradigms of cosmic order to transformation into contextual application. This path clarifies that contemporary Indian thought and culture are the result of centuries-long transformations.

Beginning with the first concept — the concept of dharma — when translated into modern language, it becomes clear that it represents a simplified version of the union between the supreme order and the norms of social order.¹⁰ Understanding

⁸ [варна-дхарма](#)

⁹ [Bhagavad Gita Verses About Dharma | 20+ Sacred Duty & Righteousness Shlokas | Srimad Gita](#)

¹⁰ [Bhagavad Gita](#)

this explains why contemporary Indian culture places primary importance on fulfilling duties within the family and considers this the highest goal for the creation of harmony in the world. Indian families, following the norms of dharma, guide their children toward appropriate positions or professions. Although this has come into conflict under conditions of post-secularization with another model of modernity, according to ancient Indian tradition, even when a child develops interests in other fields, these interests are often not taken into account, and the child is directed toward a field preferred by the parents. This is because Vedic tradition assumes that elder family members help the child — son or daughter — determine their dharma through observation. In contrast, the Western modern tradition emphasizes that determining another person's life path constitutes a violation of individual values and argues that parents who impose a profession suppress their child's abilities. This has led to a serious divide between certain social strata with the arrival of modernity.

At present, it can be observed that there are rapidly developing cities in India following paths of openness and transparency, while some cities preserve Vedic and religious practices and sacred rituals. Varanasi, a sacred city, serves as a center in India for the study of ancient Sanskrit texts and temple life.

Mathura is a center of Krishnaism, where a large portion of the population adheres to caste and family structures and maintains strong religious rituals.

Modernist centers include:

Mumbai — branches of international corporations, where youth consciously choose their own paths, careers, and lifestyles.

Bangalore — a city of startups, Western lifestyles, and technological hub centers.

Chennai — a city with a large number of universities established on the basis of Western education, where career orientation is independent of social or societal status.

Another aspect demonstrating the influence of the dharmic tradition on contemporary Indian culture is the persistent notion of “duty to society” and “proper fulfillment of roles,” which are direct products of dharma. The Prime Minister of India, N. Modi, in his speeches repeatedly emphasizes the importance of “duty to the people.” In particular, in his recent major interview with Lex Fridman, the Prime Minister repeatedly stated that he bears immense responsibility to serve his people.

Additionally, political party leaders in India, in order to attract public support, refer to philosophical and Vedic rhetoric of “service to society” to legitimize their authority. On the other hand, the contemporary Bollywood film industry also

reflects the values of Vedic traditions. A large number of films and television series focusing on svarna-dharma have been produced and have achieved widespread popularity. The film *Lagaan* (2001) demonstrates how the main character, Bhuvan, faces a personal inner choice and social duty, as he has the opportunity to lead his village to victory in cricket against the British. After prolonged reflection, he chooses duty to society, which reflects his dharma.

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