

The Role of Dharma in Indian Thought in the Light of Time and Tradition



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Synonyms

Duty; Moral order; Righteousness

Definition

Dharma defies direct translation into English, its meaning is deeply rooted in its native complexity. Within *Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism*, dharma takes a multitude of meanings reflecting the depth and diversity of these spiritual traditions ("*dharma*"-*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2021). Like Madhav Acharya, expressed that defining Dharma is not straightforward (Staff VNN, 2021). In the translation of the *Rig-Veda*, Karl Friedrich Geldner explores 20 different translations to convey to reflect the complex meaning of dharma (Horsch, 2004). In Monier-Williams' Sanskrit–English Dictionary, Dharma

is described as—"that which is established or firm, steadfast decree, statute, law, practice, custom, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, ethics, religion, religious merit, good works, nature, character, quality, property." However, this explanation, is mostly seen as the "right way of living" and a principle which maintains the balance of cosmic (Williams, 2008; Cappeller, 1999). Paul Hacker highlights that "eusebeia," the Greek word used to translate "dharma," signifies not merely reverence for deities but also spiritual maturity and appropriate behavior in family, societal contexts (Hacker, 2006). Literature links Dharma with Rta (the Vedic cosmic truth governing the universe) and Maya (illusion or deception). According to Paul Horsch, Rta and Dharma are parallel concepts, Rta as the cosmic framework and Dharma as the societal counterpart, whereas Maya disrupts the law and order that Dharma aims to preserve (Horsch, 2004; Holdrege, 2004; Koller, 1972; Northrop, 1949; "*Māyā*" Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary). In Manusmṛiti—Dharma represents the principles followed by the Vedic scholars and the ethical judgment of the righteous, who are liberated from hatred and excessive attachments (Wikipedia contributors, 2024b). Lastly the version of Adi Shankaracharya—Dharma is the righteous path, involving the principles and conduct as detailed by the sacred writings. The interpretation of Dharma varies depending on the context, and its significance has transformed over time in