National Journal of Hindi & Sanskrit Research

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Comparative Perspectives on Western and Indian Social Philosophy

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Abstract-

Social philosophy is one of the most important branches of Philosophy. It is based on human relationships in Society. Its aim is to interpret Society with reference to the Social Unity of human beings. Social Philosophy defines the relations between man and social groups. It seeks order and harmony in a social group among different groups or institutions. The basic factor of social philosophy is knowledge of social ideas in social relationships. Social philosophy is mainly two types- Western Social Philosophy and Indian Social Philosophy. Indian Social Philosophy is inherent in Dharmaśātra. It's a famous Śāstra in ancient Sanskrit Literature. The term Dharmaśāstra is generally applicable to both the Dharmasūtras and the smṛtis. The term smṛtis indicates that these codes are authorities on the basis of śruti. Manusmṛti is the first text of smṛti sahitya. According to Dr. Kevala Motavanee - 'Manu dharmaśāstra has been studied in India since the time of the advent of the Āryans in the country and has been held in high esteem like the Vedas.' Dr. Bhagvan Dash wrote a text in the name of 'The Science of Social Organization' here that mentions - 'Manusmṛti is the oldest Social Philosophy in the world.'

Objective of this research paper-

The primary objective of this research paper is to identify and critically examine how Western Social Philosophy reflects, parallels, or follows the principles of *Dharmaśāstra*. The study aims to explore the conceptual similarities between Western social thought and the normative, ethical, and institutional frameworks established in *Dharmaśāstra*, thereby highlighting the central themes of Western Social Philosophy and presenting their corresponding interpretations from a Dharmasāstric perspective.

Keynotes-

Social Philosophy, Dharmaśāstra, Saṃskārapātracaritram, Samāja, Sambhūyasamutthānam, Kulam, Gurukula Vyavastā, Karmakarā, Rājya, Nyāya, Sadācāra, Ṣāḍguṇyanīti, Dharma, Saṃskṛti, Varṇavyavasthā, and Saṃskāra.

Introduction-

In modern times, social philosophy is largely influenced by Western theories. However, Indian social philosophy is unique and unparalleled in many respects when compared to Western thought. The earliest systematic reflection on social philosophy in the world originated in India. Indian social philosophy is deeply rooted in spirituality and morality, giving it an authoritative and holistic character. In ancient Indian literature , **Dharmaśāstra** is the only discipline in which the nature of western social philosophy has been discussed extensively, though mostly in an indirect manner. Dr. Keval Motwani, in his book *Manu-dharmaśāstra*, states that Indian social philosophy is not confined to India alone; rather, its influence has extended to many parts of the world since ancient times.

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He highlights that elements of Indian social thought can be traced across several ancient civilizations of Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. [1] This widespread influence establishes theological foundation of **Dharmaśāstra** as one of the world's oldest and most enduring intellectual traditions. Because of its deep theological and social thought, India has been revered by various honorific names such as *Ārṣa Bhārata*, *Puṇyabhūmi*, *Karmabhūmi*, *Dharmabhūmi*, and *Bhārat Mātā*. This sentiment is powerfully expressed by Manu, who declares: -

एतद्देशप्रसूतस्य सकाशादग्रजन्मनः। स्वं स्वं चरित्रं शिक्षरन् पृथिव्यां सर्वमानवाः॥[2] इति It means from the presence of the elders born in this land, all people on earth learn the true nature of their own conduct." Dharmaśāstra (Indian Social Philosophy) comes from the Vedas.Vedic knowledge is believed to have originated from the divine source. The ancient sages, who realized the Vedas, composed the Kalpasūtra. The Kalpasūtra are of four types: Shrauta Sūtra, Shulba Sūtra, Dharma Sūtra , and Grihya Sūtra. Among them, the Dharma Sūtra explain the rules and structure of Indian society. From these Dharma Sutras, many Smriti-based Dharmaśāstra texts were later developed. The Dharmaśāstra explain that the proper conduct and activities of human beings are essential for maintaining a healthy social system. They describe the importance of social order and righteous living. According to the statement *"Shruti is known as the Veda, and Dharmaśāstra is Smriti"*, Bhagavan Manu explained that another special name of Dharmaśāstra is Smriti. There is no difference between Smriti and Dharmaśāstra. All Dharmaśāstra texts composed by Manu and other sages during the Smriti period are accepted as authoritative. The tradition of Dharmaśāstra is very wide and well known. Dharmaśāstra includes many important subjects such as the varna–ashrama system, samskaras (rites), five great sacrifices, and dharma. It explains social values that promote worldly welfare and benefit human life. By knowing these values and through self-realization, social upliftment and public welfare become possible.

Dharmaśāstra clearly explains what should be done and what should not be done, what is beneficial and harmful, and what is proper and improper. A person who follows these principles correctly in life is called an Arya. As stated:- One who performs his duties and avoids forbidden actions, and lives according to natural conduct, is called an Arya."- कर्तव्यम् आचरन् काममकर्तव्यमनाचरन्। तिष्ठति प्रकृताचारे स वा आर्य इति स्मृतः॥ [3] इति

From the Vedas to everyday social life, dharmaśāstra is accepted everywhere as an authority. Therefore, all scholars have praised Dharmaśāstra. It is said: "Dharma is the foundation of the whole world. Through Dharma people progress; through Dharma sins are destroyed; everything is established in Dharma." यथा- *"धर्मो विश्वस्य जगतः प्रतिष्ठा धर्मेण प्रजाः उपसर्पन्ति, धर्मेण पापम् अपनुदति, धर्मे सर्वं प्रतिष्ठितम्।[4]"* इति Although eating, sleeping, fear, and reproduction are common to both humans and animals, human greatness is seen through the practice of Dharma. Thus, Dharmaśāstra exists to establish the true dignity of human life.

Dharmaśāstra- In sacred India, among all the scriptures that explain the four goals of life—Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha- Dharmaśāstra holds a special place as it follows the authority of the Vedas. This is accepted by all scholars.

• The word *Dharma* comes from the root *"dhṛ"*, meaning to uphold and nourish. A scripture that explains Dharma is called Dharmaśāstra.

• The scripture praised by all other scriptures is called Dharmaśāstra.

• A scripture that teaches rules and guidance for complete human development is called Dharmaśāstra.

• A scripture that helps in attaining the four goals of life is called Dharmaśāstra.

• A scripture that is authoritative like the Vedas, based on Shruti, is known as Dharmaśāstra.

• A scripture that gives knowledge of human rites and conduct is also called Dharmaśāstra . Dharmaśāstra discusses important topics such as conduct, social laws, penance, rites, charity, sacrifice, ancestor worship, ethics, devotion, time, purity, impurity, worship, and peace.

Based on its authority from the Vedas, the subjects of Dharmashastra are generally divided into three parts:

1. Achāra (Conduct)
2. Vyavahāra (Law and Justice)
3. Prayashchitta (Atonement)

The Achāra section describes duties that produce Dharma, such as rites from conception to death, duties of social classes and stages of life, daily routine, five great sacrifices, vows, fasting, purity of materials, and customs of place, family, and community. The Vyavahāra section explains royal duties such as protection of subjects and land, justice, eighteen types of disputes, punishment, and inheritance laws. The Prayashchitta section explains sins, their causes, classifications of sinful acts (major and minor sins), and rules of atonement.

Interpreting the Subjects of Western Social Philosophy through Dharmaśāstric Thought-

In the modern age, the Western social philosopher J. S. Mackenzie presented the main subjects of social philosophy in his book *Outlines of Social Philosophy*. Below, these subjects are explained according to **Dharmaśāstra** , that is, from the viewpoint of Indian social philosophy.

Western Social Philosophy	Dharmaśāstra (Indian View)
Human Nature	Saṃskārapātracaritram
Community	Samudāya / Samāja
Modes of Association	Sambhūyasamutthānam
Family	Kulam
Educational Institutions	Gurukula Vyavastā
Industrial Institutions / Workers	Karmakarā
The State	Rājya
Justice	Nyāya
Social Ideals	Sadācāra / Śiṣṭācāra
International Relations	Ṣāḍguṇyanīti.
Place of Religion	Dharma..
Place of Culture	Saṃskṛti .
Caste System	Varṇavyavasthā
Rituals	Saṃskāra

Indian social philosophy, as explained in Dharmaśāstra , gives importance to moral conduct, collective welfare, Dharma, and character formation, offering a holistic and value-based view of society.

1. Human Nature (Saṃskārapātracaritram) -

Social philosophy examines the place of human beings in the world, the definition of humanity, and the social nature of humans. Human beings hold a unique and independent position on earth. Among all living beings, humans are considered the (highest) and most beneficial.

The natural and fundamental quality of humanity is the power of thought or reasoning (discrimination). Because of this power, humans are different from all other creatures. From the beginning of creation, humans have reflected upon themselves. Social philosophers state that human reason illuminates life like a divine light and has the capacity to unite the whole world. From birth to death, humans continuously try to solve their problems through reasoning power.

 Dharmaśāstra acts as a guide and teacher of human life. In Dharmaśāstra, *human nature* is described as "character shaped by samskaras (impressions)". A person's nature is formed by impressions acquired in previous lives. To make human nature stable and strong, Dharmaśāstra prescribes moral knowledge and religious practices. Since a person's nature determines the direction and stability of life, Manu states that once an action is properly performed according to Dharma, it should not be abandoned. यथा-

तीरितं चानुशिष्टं च यत्र क्वचन यद्भवेत्। कृतं तद्धर्मतो विद्यात्र तद्भूयो निवर्तयेत्।।[5] **इति**

Thus, to attain noble character, practicing the principles of **Dharmaśāstra** in daily life is essential.

2. Community   (Samudāya / Samāja)

   Community is a fundamental subject of social philosophy. It may refer to a village, town, or nation. A group of people living together for common welfare is called a community. The English word *community* means "to serve together."

When people live together selflessly to fulfill social needs, it forms a community. In villages, towns, and nations, humans fulfill their economic, political, religious, and cultural needs collectively. Where long-term social interaction exists, a community naturally develops. Here, collective welfare is more important than individual interest.

- In **Dharmaśāstra**, *community* is called Samāja (society)—a place where people unite and work together for common good. Indian scriptures use many terms for society, such as country, people, state, and nation. Detailed discussion of society appears in the context of royal duties. यथा-

- **त्रय्या हि रक्षितो लोकः प्रसीदति न सीदति।।**[6] **इति**

- **रम्यमानतसामन्तं स्वाजीव्यं देशमावसेत्।।**[7] **इति**

3. Modes of Association (Sambhūyasamutthānam)-

   The systems through which social institutions function are called modes of association. These systems help in the creation, protection, and stability of social institutions like family and education.

In **Dharmaśāstra**, this concept is called Sambhūya-samutthāna, meaning collective enterprise. Merchants, priests, workers, and farmers jointly perform their duties for common benefit. Profit and loss are shared according to contribution and agreement. This concept is clearly explained by Nārada, emphasizing cooperation and fairness in collective work. यथा- **वणिक्प्रभृतयो यत्र कर्म सम्भूय कुर्वते। तत्सम्भूयसमुत्थानं व्यवहारपदं स्मृतम्।। फलहेतोरुपायेन कर्म सम्भूय कुर्वताम्। आधारभूतः प्रक्षेपस्तेनोत्तिष्ठेयुरंशतः।। समोऽतिरिक्तो हीनो वा तत्रांशे यस्य यादृशः। क्षयव्ययौ तथा वृद्धिस्तस्य तत्र तथाविधाः।।**[8] **इति**

4. Family (Kulam)

   Family is a vital unit of social philosophy and the foundation of society and the nation. It is a universal institution. Indian thought gives the highest importance to family. Moral, cultural, economic, religious, and social values are first learned in the family.

There are two types of families:

1. Nuclear family – parents and children

2. Joint family – multiple generations living together

Marriage is an essential part of family life. Endogamous and exogamous marriages are discussed in both social philosophy and **Dharmaśāstra**.

In Dharmashastra, family is called Kulam. Man and woman together form the foundation of the family. Here Manu Said- द्विधा कृत्वाऽऽऽत्मनो देहमर्धेन पुरुषोऽभवत्। अर्धेन नारी तस्यां च विराजमसृजत्प्रभुः।।[9] इति

In a joint family, the members include the mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, daughter-in-law, grandson, and great-grandson. In such a family system, the father has the main responsibility of protecting and managing the family. यथा-

सन्तुष्टो भार्यया भर्ता भर्त्रा भार्या तथैव च। यस्मिन्नेव कुले नित्यं कल्याणं तत्र वै ध्रुवम्।।[10] इति

Therefore, it is stated that in a joint family, a woman should not spend the family wealth or even her husband's wealth according to her own wish, without the permission of her husband. This rule was meant to maintain discipline, harmony, and proper management of the joint family system.

According to **Dharmaśāstra**, the Creator divided His own being into two parts—one became man and the other became woman. From this union, creation continued. Thus, man and woman together form the foundation of the family.

The *Manusmriti* states that when both husband and wife are satisfied with each other, peace and prosperity always remain in that family. Mutual harmony between husband and wife ensures the well-being of the household.

यथा- सन्तुष्टो भार्यया भर्ता भर्त्रा भार्या तथैव च। यस्मिन्नेव कुले नित्यं कल्याणं तत्र वै ध्रुवम्।।[11] इति

Dharmaśāstra strongly emphasizes the importance of the joint family system. Texts such as *Gautama Dharmasutra*, *Manusmriti*, *Yajnavalkya Smriti*, and *Narada Smriti* highlight the special value of the joint family as the basis of social harmony and moral life. यथा- ऊर्ध्वंपितुश्च मातुश्च समेत्य भ्रातरः समम्।। भजेरन् पैतृकं रिक्थमनीशास्ते हि जीवतोः।।[12] इति

The members of a joint family include the mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, daughter-in-law, grandson, and great-grandson. In a joint family, the father has the primary responsibility of protecting and managing the family. Therefore, it is stated that a woman should not spend the joint family property or her husband's wealth according to her own will. यथा-

न निर्हारं स्त्रियः कुर्युः कुटुम्बाद्बहुमध्यगात्। स्वकादपि च वित्ताद् हि स्वस्य भर्तुरनाज्ञया।। [13] इति

The main purpose of the family is the protection of Dharma.

5. Educational Institutions (Gurukula Vyavastā)
Social philosophy discusses the importance, methods, and aims of education.

The Dharmaśāstraic education system, especially the Gurukula system, is the inspiration for modern education. Discipline, moral training, self-control, non-violence, truthfulness, and character-building are the main aims of education.

Education is not only intellectual but also ethical and spiritual. **Dharmaśāstra** describes educational samskaras such as initiation into learning, sacred thread ceremony, study of the Vedas, and completion of education. "In the Dharmaśāstras, a system called *Brahmanidhi* existed for the protection and support of the field of education." यथा- न तं स्तेना न चामित्रा हरन्ति न च नश्यति। तस्माद्राज्ञा निधातव्यो ब्राह्मणेष्वक्षयो निधिः।। न स्कन्धते न च्यवते न विनश्यति कहिर्चित्। वशिष्टमग्निहोत्रेभ्यः ब्राह्मणस्य मुखे हृतम्।।[14] इति

6. Industrial Institutions (Karmakarā)-

Social philosophy examines the role of workers, cooperation, wages, and justice. In **Dharmaśāstra**, workers are called Karmakaras. According to *Narada*, workers are classified into four types based on their roles.

1. Shishya – A student who studies after undergoing the *Upanayana* (sacred initiation ceremony).
2. Antevasi – A learner who stays with the teacher, especially to learn skills or crafts.
3. Bhritiya (Bhritaka) – A servant or worker who does work for wages.
4. Adhikarmakrit – A person appointed to manage or work in family-related business matters.

यथा- शिष्यान्तेवासिभृतकाश्चतुर्थस्त्वधिकर्मकृत्। एते कर्मकराः प्रोक्ता दासास्तु गृहजातयः।।[15] इति

Wages are determined according to ability, devotion, and nature of work. **Dharmaśāstra** strongly supports fair wages, worker protection, and legal remedies. Kings were responsible for protecting labor rights and ensuring justice.

7. State (Rājya)

Social philosophy discusses the nature, governance, ethics, and administration of the state. **Dharmaśāstra** considers the state (Rajya) as a primary subject. National prosperity depends on fertile land, natural resources, trade, water, education, and moral citizens. Manu emphasizes that without learned and virtuous leaders, a nation suffers from poverty and disorder. यथा-

यद्राष्ट्रं शूद्रभूयिष्ठं नास्तिकाक्रान्तमद्विजम्। विनश्यत्याशु तत्कृत्स्नं दुर्भिक्षव्याधिपीडितम्।।[16] इति

8. Justice (Nyāya)
Justice is a central theme in social philosophy. In social philosophy, all legal matters are described. These include the general concept of justice, distribution of justice, educational justice, justice in exchange, reward, punishment, equality, and rights.

Dharmaśāstra gives detailed explanations of judicial administration. The king's foremost duty is fair justice. Judicial decisions should be based on Dharma, free from anger and greed. यथा- धर्मप्रधाना पुरुषाः पूर्वमासन्नहिंसकाः। लोभद्वेषाभिभूतानां व्यवहारः प्रकीर्तितः।।[17] इति

A king who wishes to examine legal matters (cases or disputes) should carry out his duties in consultation with learned Brāhmaṇas and ministers. This has been clearly prescribed in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti. A king who wishes to examine legal matters (cases or disputes) should carry out his duties in consultation with learned Brāhmaṇas and ministers. This has been clearly prescribed in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti.- व्यवहारन्नृपः पश्येद्विद्वद्भिर्ब्राह्मणैः सह। धर्मशास्त्रानुसारेण क्रोधलोभविवर्जितः।।[18] इति

Although *Arthashaśāstra* exists, **Dharmaśāstra** is considered superior in moral authority. In cases without evidence, the king becomes the final authority.

"यत्र विप्रतिपत्तिः स्याद् धर्मशास्त्रार्थशास्त्रयोः। अर्थशास्त्रोक्तमुत्सृज्य धर्मशास्त्रोक्तमाचरेत्। धर्मशास्त्रविरोधे तु युक्तियुक्तोऽपि धर्मतः। व्यवहारो हि बलवान् धर्मस्तेनापचीयते।।"[19] इति

According to Manu, there are eighteen kinds of legal disputes (*Vyavahāra*)-

1. r̥ṇādānaṁ
2. nikṣepaḥ
3. asvāmi-vikrayaḥ
4. sambhūya-samutthānaṁ
5. dattasyānāpakarma
6. vetanādānaṁ
7. saṁvid-vyatikramaḥ
8. kraya-vikraya-anuśayaḥ
9. svāmi-pāla-vivādaḥ
10. sīmā-vivādaḥ
11. vāk-pāruṣyaṁ
12. daṇḍa-pāruṣyaṁ
13. steyaṁ
14. sāhasaṁ
15. strī-saṅgrahaṇaṁ
16. strī-puṇḍarmaḥ
17. vibhāgaḥ and
18. dyūta-samāhvayaḥ

9. Social Ideals (Sadāchāra)-

Social philosophy discusses ideals like equality, freedom, brotherhood, democracy, and moral excellence. These ideals apply equally to all people, regardless of caste or gender.

In **Dharmaśāstra**, social ideals are expressed through Sadāchāra (righteous conduct). "सतां साधूनां य आचारः स सदाचारः। "Good conduct (Sadāchāra) is the foundation of moral society and national character. Manu, Gautama, and Yajnavalkya unanimously declare that Dharma is based on the Vedas, Smriti, and good conduct. For the construction of a great nation, knowledge of proper conduct (Sadāchāra) is extremely necessary. यथा- आचारः परमो धर्मः श्रुत्युक्तः स्मार्त एव च। तस्मादस्मिन्सदायुक्तो नित्यं स्यादात्मवान्द्विजः।।[20] इति

10. International Relations (Ṣaḍguṇya Nīti).

International relations refer to the political, economic, social, cultural, and military connections between two or more countries. For the protection and development of a nation, it is necessary not only to maintain good relations with neighbouring countries but also to establish friendly and positive relations with all nations. Thus, the main goal of international relations is the welfare of the nation. From a social philosophy perspective, the study of international relations includes:

- General introduction to international relations
- International ethics
- International law and regulations
- International trade
- War and peace
- Progress in international relations

In Dharmaśāstra, the principles of international relations are described through the Ṣaḍguṇya Nīti (Sixfold Policy).It explains how and when a nation should maintain relations with other nations. According to Manu Smṛti, the study of international relations is based on war and peace. International relations are divided into six categories (Ṣaḍguṇya).- Sandhih, Vigrahah, Yānah, Āsanaḥ, Sanśrayaḥ, Dvaidhibhāva. "सन्धिं च विग्रहं चैव यानासनमेव च। द्वैधीभावं संश्रयं च षड्गुणांश्चिन्तयेत्सदा।।"[21] इति

Further, there are four types of states in international relations:

1. Friendly state (Mitra)
2. Hostile state (Shatru)
3. Neutral/Indifferent state (Udasin)
4. Mediating state (Madhyastha)

These classifications are based on the Sixfold Policy (Ṣaḍguṇya Nīti).

11. Religion- (Dharma)

Society cannot exist even for a moment without dharma. In fact, the upliftment of society is possible only through dharma. Therefore, social philosophy discusses the nature of dharma, its main characteristics, religious practices, religion in education, religion and social service, the relationship between the state and religion, religious tolerance, international religion, the role of religion in social equality, the defects within religion, and religious progress. Here, the word *dharma* is used in the sense of "Religion," and therefore it is understood in a somewhat narrow meaning.

In Western thought, religion has a limited meaning, but in Dharmashastra, Dharma includes law, duty, morality, conduct, and social order. Dharma supports society just as life supports the body. It guides humans from birth to death. Manu declares that Dharma alone accompanies a person even after death. 'एक एव सुहृद्धर्मो निधनेऽप्यनुयाति यः।

शरीरेण समं नाशं सर्वमन्यद्धि गच्छति ।।[22] इति

12. Culture (Saṃskṛti)

Social philosophy highlights culture as the goal of human life. It discusses the nature of culture, the place of science in culture, the place of literature in culture, the place of philosophy in culture, and the social importance of culture.

Dharmaśāstra represents eternal Indian culture, which purifies, refines, and elevates human life.Indian culture emphasizes truth, non-violence, tolerance, sacrifice, respect for parents and teachers, spirituality, and universal welfare. **Dharmaśāstra** is the primary text explaining these values.

यथा- **सा प्रथमा संस्कृतिर्विश्ववारा।[23] इति 'सत्याहिंसागुणैः श्रेष्ठा, विश्वबन्धुत्वशिक्षिका । विश्वशान्तिसुखाधात्री, भारतीया हि संस्कृतिः ।।'[24]** इति

13. Ritual Acts (Dhārmika Anustan) -

Social philosophers use the concept of religious rituals in the sense of "purity and perfection."It is stated that by performing these rituals in a proper and prescribed manner, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual purification takes place. Although there are many religious rituals, social philosophers believe that the sixteen sacraments (Ṣoḍaśa Saṃskāras) are of special importance.

In Dharmaśāstra, the term "Saṃskāra" is mentioned in the context of religious rituals. Dharmaśāstra explains sixteen samskaras from conception to funeral rites.1. Garbādhānam 2. Puṃsavanam 3.Sīmantonnayanam 4.Jāta-karma 5.Nāmakaraṇam 6.Niṣkramaṇam 7.Annaprāśanam 8.Cūḍākarma 9. Karṇavedhaḥ 10. Akṣarārambhaḥ11. Upanayanam 12. Vedārambhaḥ 13.Keśāntaḥ 14.Samāvar-tanam 15.Vivāhaḥ 16. Antyeṣṭisaṃskāraḥ (Śmaśānaḥ). These rituals purify physical, mental, social, and spiritual life.

14. Caste System (Varna System)-

The caste system is a form of social organization. In it, a person's purity and impurity are taken into consideration. The term *jāti* (caste) is derived from the word "Jana" (people/birth). Therefore, the origin of the caste system is based on birth. Through hereditary succession, endogamous marriage (marriage within the same caste), restrictions on commensality (food relations), occupation, and hierarchical gradation of castes, the caste system is established and

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