
‘DHARMA’ AS ETHICAL VALUES IN THE SANSKRIT-OLD JAVANESE ‘SĀRASAMUCCAYA’ TEXT

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Abstract

The ‘Sārasamuccaya’, written in Sanskrit-Old Javanese, is a celebrated work on ethics that reflects the essence of the ‘Mahābhārata’. This paper offers a qualitative analysis of the ethical and moral aspects of the ‘Sārasamuccaya’. It finds that ‘dharma’ is mainly based on ethical values intended to guide spiritual seekers to reach the highest goal of life (‘mokṣa’). Volitional actions (‘śubha karma’) and prohibited actions (‘aśubha karma’) are elaborately described to illustrate the importance of ‘dharma’ in the pursuit of happiness. Meanwhile, it also details the concept of the ‘tri-kāyas’: (i) ‘dharma’ (righteousness), by which (ii) ‘artha’ (possession) and (iii) ‘kāma’ (desire) can be experienced or achieved. The fulfilment of possession and desire are meaningless when they are devoid of the ‘right way of living’ (‘dharma’). These findings contribute to the study of morals elucidated in Sanskrit-Old Javanese literature.

Keywords: dharma, ethics, tri-kāya, puruṣārtha, modernity

1. Introduction

Ancient civilisation provides various written documents and oral traditions on the quest for knowledge and spiritual advancement. The Nusantara archipelago of present-day Indonesia has inherited many *lontar* (palm-leaf) manuscripts of various genres, subjects and languages [1] documenting the literary traditions of its people. During the 15th century pre-Islamic Java, while Sanskrit was used to spread Indian culture throughout South East Asia since the 4th century [2], Old Javanese was crucial in the development of Javanese civilisation [3], which also influenced Balinese culture. As Aciri states, for over a millennium, *lontar* - considered to have powerful, almost supernatural status - were used to document both sacred and mundane knowledge [<https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/living-balinese-heritage-palm-leaf-manuscripts-their->

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caretakers]. To the present day, Bali retains and develops its Old Javanese literary tradition (*nyastra*).

Sārasamuccaya (henceforth SS) is a work on ethics created in medieval Java. Principally, it discusses *dharma* along with other elements of ethics. The manuscript was written onto palm leaves (*lontar* in Sanskrit) in Old Javanese (known as *Kavi*). The SS consists of 519 *ślokas* (cantos). Although no date is mentioned, it was probably composed during the 13th-15th century reign of the Majapahit kingdom in East Java, when stylistic elements of Old Javanese and Sanskrit were widely used. Before expounding the teachings of the SS, Vararuci, the composer, pays homage to great sage Vyasa, as the composer of *Aṣṭadaśa-parvas* (SS, stanza 1). As testified in its *maṅgala* (introduction), the SS is regarded as the essence of the *Aṣṭadaśa-parvas* (eighteen volumes) of the *Mahābhārata* epic, which discusses various topics, including ethics. This type of text is also classified into *subhāsita saṃgraha* [4] or collections of ethical teachings. However, as Raghu Vira remarked, neither the SS nor Bhagavan Vararuci, the author, is known in India - no wonder, as they were Indonesian [5]. Therefore, the SS was perhaps created for Indonesia's royal courts and the people of Indonesia [5]. Due to Vararuci's skill in Sanskrit and deep knowledge of the *Mahābhārata*, it is probable that he visited India (*Bharata*) at some point. Raghu Vira stated that the SS written by the sage Vararuci represents the "Gītā of the Balinese Hindus" [5]. It contains the essence of the high teachings and noble ideals outlined in the *Mahābhārata* and is richly deserving the devotion and reverence it has received through the centuries by Balinese Hindus.

Crucially, by understanding *dharma*, one can become aligned with the 'right view' as set out in the SS, to achieve eternal happiness based on the four goals of life (known as *catur puruṣa artha*). Given that the modern world's many social and environmental issues (as discussed later) are due to declining moral standards and are, to a significant extent, driven by the massive developments in modern science and technology, the SS offers invaluable ethical teachings that are highly relevant and much needed. This paper addresses the gap in the existing literature by investigating how the ethical virtues (*dharma*) discussed in the SS are highly relevant as a panacea for the modern era.

2. Dharma in the Sārasamuccaya

2.1. The significance of the Sārasamuccaya

First, the SS declares that any effort to perform *dharma* never fails. One who performs *dharma* can destroy all sins - like the Sun overcomes all darkness (SS, 16, 18). *Dharma* is the source of all happiness for those who perform it sincerely. *Dharma* is also the protector of the learned and can destroy the *tri loka* (three worlds) (SS, 18); viz. *bhur*, *bvah* and *svah loka* (viz. Earth, air and sky, respectively). One steadfast in *dharma* is assured happiness by avoiding causing suffering to others (SS, 19) or engaging in acts harmful to others and/or the environment. Practising *dharma* is described metaphorically like watering a

sugar cane plantation: not only does the sugar cane itself receive water but also do all the surrounding plants. Similarly, one who performs *dharmā* (righteousness), will be justly rewarded with *artha* (possessions/wealth), *kāma* (desire/lust) and *yasa* (glory) (SS, 20). One who performs *dharmā* will be rewarded with an auspicious rebirth: blessed with an attractive physical appearance, nobility, wealth; reaping the benefits of their worthy past actions (*karma*) (SS, 21). One who performs *dharmā* will not succumb to any worldly dangers, even though they may face difficult situations (SS, 22). One who realises the inevitability of death will avoid committing wrongful actions (SS, 26) because this leads to suffering (or hell). Based on these principles, the SS suggests that one's youth should be utilised by studying, practising and achieving *dharmā*, *artha* and knowledge. One's life is likened to *kuśa* grass (a spiky-tipped sacred plant used in Hindu ritual): when old, like the *kuśa* grass, one will become weak and lose sharpness (SS, 27). In youth, one is destined to enter adulthood; in adulthood, one is destined to enter old age; in old age, one is destined to face death at some point. Therefore, one's time should be utilised by performing *dharmā* (SS, 29) since the human lifespan is short (like a lightning bolt). When facing one's death, no one is able to provide help; only the deeds one has performed during one's lifetime can help. Therefore, one should attempt to perform *dharmā* whenever possible because *dharmā* is a devoted friend who accompanies the human soul to achieve eternal happiness and emancipation (SS, 32, 33, 34). The SS further states that *dharmā* is true wealth; it cannot be stolen as *dharmā* follows one into death. Therefore, irrespective of sex, race, social status, etc., everyone should always attempt to act *dharmically* (SS, 49, 50). One who performs *dharmā* sincerely will be rewarded with ample resources to cover one's basic needs; worldly resources are easily obtained as if they offer themselves of their own accord (SS, 51, 53). The above statements are taken as moral injunctions and prohibitions that set out the foundations and spirit of how one should act.

2.2. The meanings of Dharma

Dharma, a Sanskrit word, is popular in both orthodox (*astika*) and heterodox (*nāstika*) thought in Indian traditions. However, each school of thought considers *dharmā* differently with respect to their respective metaphysical standpoints; hence, *dharmā* has been defined and explained in many different ways over time. According to the *Sanskrit-Hindi Dictionary* by V.S. Apte [6] *dharmā* means: (1) duty, species and the following of duties according to sect; (2) law, custom, tradition, order, enactment; (3) religious or moral virtues, goodness, moral acts, one of the four ideals of human existence; (4) behaviour and conduct according to the prescription of the *śāstras*; (5) rights, justice, validity, equity, detachment; (6) purity, usefulness; (7) morality, ethics; (8) nature, temperament, character; (9) basic qualities, characteristics, peculiarities, religiosity; (10) procedures; and (11) the *Upaniṣads*. Malhotra in his article 'Dharma is not the same as Religion' interprets *dharmā* as having

multiple context-dependent meanings [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dharma-religion_b_875314]. These include conduct, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, religion, religious merit, good work according to a right or rule, etc. *Dharma* provides principles for the harmonious fulfilment of all aspects of life, namely, the acquisition of wealth and power (*artha*), the fulfilment of desires (*kāma*) and spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*). Religion, then, is only one subset of *dharma*'s scope [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dharma-religion_b_875314]. In *Sārasamuccaya* (44), good actions (*śubha karma*) will lead one to reach true happiness; on the contrary, bad actions (*aśubha karma*) will bring suffering.

Dharma is the underlying principle of all existences. As Sharma mentions, *dharma* is the central principle of Indian Ethics [7]; whereas *Sārasamuccaya* defines *dharma* as truth and nobility (*ñhiñ dharma keta saksat hayu, saksat vibava naranya...*). It reminds us to adhere to *dharma* (truth), to achieve eternal emancipation (SS, 35). *Dharma* is the pervading and surrounding principle of reality (SS, 43); it is a glorious secret (*rahasya*); it is like the path of fish in water, even a *dhārmika* (one who leads life in the path of righteousness) is found indulging in the pursuit of *dharma* (SS, 54). Therefore, these definitions reveal that *dharma* is the foundation of all of life's goals. As *dharma* is so vast and subtle, it has many meanings covering Philosophy, Theology, Ethics, Law, and ritual.

Indeed, some scholars claim that *dharma* has no equivalent term in other languages; Moghe states that it cannot be properly rendered into English [8]. Historically, the term has passed through several transitions. *Dharma* appears for the first time as an adjective in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, or as a noun mostly used to mean 'upholder' or 'supporter', as is evident from the *Rig-Veda* passages [9]. In almost all parts of either *Śruti* or *Smṛti*, the word *dharma* is used to denote various thoughts and actions. In this regard, Jois states that *dharma* is a Sanskrit expression of the wider import, a few of which can help us to understand the broadness of its meaning [9]. For instance, *dharma* is used to mean justice (*nyāya*), what is right in a given circumstance, moral values of life, pious obligations, righteous conduct, giving charity to those in need (e.g. to a public cause or alms to the needy), natural qualities or characteristics or properties of living beings and objects, duty and law, and constitutional law [9]. In line with these ideas, the Brahmanic religion places a focus on the ritualistic meaning of *dharma*, whereas the *Dharma Śāstra* emphasises the role of morality and the *Upaniṣads* in spiritual endeavour in pursuit of the highest knowledge vis-à-vis 'the highest good'.

2.3. *Dharma as ethical value*

In the SS, *dharma* relates to ethical or moral perspectives for both priests and laymen; hence *dharma sādhana* is used to denote its emphasis on discipline. *Dharma* - and its opposite *adharmā* - refer respectively to actions that are: (i) recommended (injunctions) and (ii) to be avoided (prohibitions), due to their resultant effects. These topics consistently feature in both the *Śruti* and *Smṛti*

literature (viz. the revelations and spiritual texts created by those with advanced spiritual knowledge, respectively). Despite their differing modes of expression, as *Smṛti* is the elaboration of the truth contained in *Śruti*, the revelation, this was a conscious decision to help spread the teachings of the Vedas to the masses. Similarly, the SS discusses *dharma* at its very beginning as the basis for achieving secret knowledge (*rahasya jñāna*) through performing *dharma* as a discipline (*dharma sādhana*). The author attempts to elucidate the true meaning and significance of *dharma* by presenting the reader with similes, analogies and metaphors. For instance, at one point, *dharma* is described metaphorically as a vessel used by a merchant to cross the sea (SS, 20), meaning that *dharma* can be used to cross the multiplicity of the world to free one's self from bondage and reach liberation (*mokṣa*). This illustrates that the issue of striving to achieve the highest good by engaging in *dharmaic* actions (*śubhakarma*) and avoiding *non-dharmaic* actions (*aśubhakarma*) became a serious consideration for the sage-poets in Java since medieval times. This is apparent in the great availability of Javanese texts on ethics such as *Śiva Śāsana*, *Vrati Śāsana*, *Śilakrama*, *Ślokāntara*, etc. The SS' elucidation of *dharma* stimulated the emergence of many texts related to ethics (*śāsana*). In summary, performing right (*dharmaic*) actions is considered the foundation on which the fulfilment of spiritual objectives can be reached.

Further, the SS explains that humans are required to act according to their own respective duties (*svadharmā*), nature, status and/or position in society because one has an intrinsic need for others - either physically or spiritually, directly or indirectly, including all non-living beings. After all, life can be seen as a network of spiritual interconnections and dependencies with their common core in divinity. Here lies the importance and significance of *dharma* - namely, regulating life in society for the benefit of all as well as providing a set of mutually beneficial moral values. The former can be traced back to metaphysical principles advocated by a system of thought (*darśana*), the latter to ethics, which enables humankind to reach their life goals. The SS states that the various stages of (human) life (*varṇa-āśrama*) are regulated by *dharma*. Each person that belongs to a particular stage of life (*āśrama*) should obey particular laws/norms according to their prescribed duties, otherwise, disharmony or chaos will ensue. To achieve a peaceful and harmonious community/society, each member of society is required to practice ethical virtues such as discipline, self-respect, self-control, respect/obedience to the law, limiting one's desires, temperance, cooperation, education, etc. *Yoga* provides a rich set of ethical values formulated in the restraints (*yamas*) and observances (*niyāmas*). The practice of these virtues has become urgent and imperative if we wish to avoid social chaos [10]. Healthy social life is possible only when the members of society share a sense of social responsibility and cooperative goodwill [10]. Performing one's duties (*svadharmā*) ensures that society will remain well ordered, harmonious and peaceful (*śanti*). Only in such a state can world happiness (*abhyudaya*) and spiritual freedom (*niḥśreyasa*) be attained. Nevertheless, worldly happiness is asserted as the foundation of spiritual freedom or release (*mokṣa*) from bondage.

Thus, *dharma* represents both the truth as well as the regulatory principle for preparing for such states to become manifest.

The SS asserts that cosmic law (*ṛta*) is a highly abstract and subtle principle covering the universal order; as such, it is difficult for humankind to comprehend its existence. However, *dharma* provides us with a more easily comprehensible manifestation of cosmic law (*ṛta*), since actions based on *dharma* lead to human happiness. One who acts contrary to *dharma* (due to his arrogance or ignorance), will experience hell in this life or the afterlife (*naraka*) (SS, 53). *Dharma*, in a trans-empirical sense, is brought to the empirical level of human understanding and swings between the two opposing poles, i.e. good/right action (*śubha karma*) and wrong action (*aśubha karma*).

The SS guarantees that whosoever performs *dharma* sincerely will never fail (SS, 21). Everyone, irrespective of social status, when acting on a willingness to act according to *dharma* (i.e. act ethically), will surely be rewarded (SS, 23). *Dharma* itself will protect those seeking it; and for a priest (who has become steadfast in performing *dharma*), *dharma* itself becomes their main assistance (SS, 24). *Dharma* provides inner protection through the very self-realisation of *dharma*. *Dharma* is likened to life itself, be it in waking life or in a dream or sleep state. In contrast, actions classified as *adharmic* lead us away from the right path. Accordingly, there is no point in pursuing any actions that are in contradiction with *dharma* despite the (temporary) pleasures, enjoyments or comforts one may derive. Such temporary happiness firmly establishes the individual-self in bondage to worldly pleasures. True spiritual seekers are only interested in eternal happiness. Temporary sensual enjoyment is fleeting and myopic: it should be transcended to attain a higher level of consciousness. The greatness of *dharma* behaves as the underlying principle of all actions; it gives moral strength, direction and meaning to one's enjoyments of *arthas* (possessions) and *kāma* (desires). However, attaining *artha* and *kāma* is fruitless and ultimately spiritually bankrupt when not based on the pursuit of *dharma* (SS, 18). Seeking *artha* and *kāma* without *dharma* leads to *adharmic* actions, which lead to suffering, misery and hell. Even though apparently *adharmic* actions may provide (temporary) pleasure, they ultimately lead to suffering. The SS elucidates that like the Sun sheds light to vanquish the darkness of the Universe, similarly, one who performs *dharma* eradicates all suffering in life (SS, 22). Ultimately, *dharmic* action brings one closer to perfection in terms of cosmic law while *adharmic* action leads one to imperfection.

The SS counsels that, due to its great significance, one should perform *dharma* whenever possible despite the difficulties of youth and adulthood and not necessarily wait until old age, because the time of one's death is uncertain and unforetold (SS, 37). Death remains a mystery for the unenlightened soul; therefore, only *dharma* can guide us in this world and the afterlife (SS, 36). While one's family members can only accompany us until the time of our death, in the afterlife, only our past good conduct (*śubhakarma*) or bad conduct (*aśubhakarma*) accompany us; the former being *dharma*, whereas the latter is *adharmic* (SS, 38). In life, when one pursues *adharmic* actions, this is due to a

failure to adopt a 'right' (*dharmic*) view of life; consequently, this causes suffering and inauspicious birth. When the spiritual self (*jīva*) departs from the body, the body is disposed of, being no longer of any use - similar to throwing away a broken cup (SS, 39), one can see the essence of this teaching in everyday objects. Therefore, one should make every effort to perform *dharma*, as it represents a faithful friend who supports us in attaining eternal happiness (SS, 38, 39). After all, the result or effect of our actions (*dharmic* or *adharmic*) will bind themselves to our *jīva* and will be responsible for our actions in life. That said, the SS also reminds us that one should take great care of the body as it is the medium via which the pursuits of wealth (*artha*), desire (*kāma*) and eternal release/freedom (*mokṣa*) can be achieved. In this respect, the *Bhagavad-gītā* mentions this teaching as *dharma-kṣetra*: the battlefield of *dharma* and *adharma*. In other words, *artha*, *kāma* or *mokṣa* cannot be attained without a healthy body and pure mind.

2.4. *Dharma and its relation to the tri-kāyas*

Why does the SS suggest that we should espouse *dharma* in life? By adopting a firm commitment to *dharma*, one gains an unparalleled resistance to overcome any difficulties one may encounter in life that may pose a disturbance to or endanger one's spiritual quest for release/freedom (*mokṣa*) as well as social harmony. *Dharma* provides a galvanising force that encourages one to lead life confidently and independently based on the clear goals it sets out. One who has developed a firm commitment to *dharma* is able to resist heat and cold, trials and tribulations. *Dharma* acts as a tonic or medicine, purifying our actions and destroying our sins (SS, 40). Accordingly, performing *dharma* is considered to represent an act of beauty (SS, 40), as it manifests the various values encompassed by divinity. A person whose mind is strongly committed to *dharma* can perform *dharmic* actions properly despite any external disturbances or temptations. On the contrary, a person whose mind is devoid of (or lacking in commitment to) *dharma* suffers great uncertainty, confusion, and distraction, as it has no faith in the truth (*dharmic*) on which to secure itself. In summary, this is why, from the beginning, students of *dharma* are introduced to these two opposing principles (viz. *dharma* vs. *adharmic*) and are expected to be able to recognise and identify the correct course(s) of action in life.

Dharma is always connected to the *tri-kāyas* (the three actions); viz. the mind (*manas*), speech (*vāk*) and action (*kāya*). Actions that fail to espouse the spirit of *dharma* are meaningless. Only when one's actions are shaped and expressed through the *tri-kāyas* do they become meaningful and significant in one's life, in which the mind (*manas*) plays an important role. Even though wealth (*artha*) and desire (*kāma*) are closely connected, *dharma* does not depend on *artha* and *kāma*; instead, it controls, pervades, and becomes the very spirit of *artha* and *kāma*. *Dharma* is the underlying principle on which wealth (*artha*) and desire (*kāma*) function. Seeking the pleasures of *artha* and *kāma* should be ideally based on and directed by *dharma*, otherwise, it will lead to misery or

hell. While *dharma* is an abstract metaphysical concept, one's (dharmically aligned) mind (*manas*) and dharmic (bodily) actions bring *dharma* into the realm of human understanding. As the mind and body are closely connected, the implementation of *dharma* occurs on the plane of the physical body and its interaction with its environment (either in the physical or spiritual realm). *Dharmic* or *adharmic* actions are initiated in the mind (*manas*) as thoughts and dialectical ideas that occur in diverse ways. Dialectical thoughts derived from purely logical premises and overshadowed by the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) cause one's *vāk* (speech) and *kāya* (actions) to tend towards *adharmic*. To explain, the mind (*manas*) is the intermediary plane connecting the inner self to the external world; when the mind is weak, it tends to pursue unjust/unethical (*adharmic*) actions, which come to dominate one's thought processes. This represents a great danger as words and actions become easily controlled by the (egoic) mind. All unjust/unethical (*adharmic*) actions are controlled by the egoic (or *ahaṃkāra*) mind where the ego dominates over the *sattvic* (pure or dharmically aligned) mind.

The SS goes on to mention that the products of the *tri-kāyas* (the three actions: the mind (*manas*), speech (*vāk*) and action (*kāya*)) cannot secure lasting happiness; ultimately, they cause suffering and sickness, and so we should avoid performing the *tri-kāyas* in an *adharmic* way. Rather, one should make all efforts to perform deeds *dharmically* to benefit all beings based on compassion and love. Indeed, the SS states that when you know that your intended action is contrary to *dharma*, it is better not to perform it (SS, 47, 50) because its effects will be useless and result in unnecessary suffering. In summary, the SS recommends that when one has fully realised the teachings of *dharma*, one should keep it in firmly established one's heart (SS, 50) via the *tri-kāyas* (the three actions) to purify and cast the light of your *sattvic* (pure or dharmically aligned) mind onto your life for the benefit of all beings.

3. Relevance

The modern world is afflicted by immense human suffering due to a widespread deficit of a commitment to moral and spiritual principles across many areas. For example, our notable scientific achievements are not aligned with commensurate progress in morality and spirituality; governments' and leaders' weak adherence to *dharmic* moral values continues to trigger further crises - human and environmental - almost daily. Ecological imbalance is a looming global threat; global warming, as well as third-world debt, war, drug use and high crime and murder rates are difficult to reduce. Unarguably, humankind is in desperate need of a uniting principle to encourage and develop our respect for humanity, a willingness for mutually beneficial cooperation and environmentally sensitive human activity. Chakravarty states that while disintegration and disruption have gripped our global community, the belief that spiritual truths are almost of no practical use in the world has gained ground [11]. Consequently, the modern military-industrial complex's emphasis on

profit-maximisation over the just allocation of resources according to true need, on narrow racial, communal and sectarian divisions, promotes an ever-escalating sense of confusion and uncertainty. In addition, modern technologies tend to have dehumanising effects if moral values are neglected in their development and use. The greater freedoms and prosperity provided by dominant democratic forms of government have not been matched by commensurate spiritual and social guidance. Therefore, the author asserts that the teachings of *dharma* can provide an effective and all-encompassing means by which humankind can develop a greater awareness of the need for moral guidance in our thought, speech, and actions at all levels of society, and offers a multitude of benefits for those who perform it sincerely.

Another problem worth mentioning is the decreasing sense of brotherhood and tolerance amongst religious and ethnic groups across the globe. Social cohesion is arguably disintegrating; the self-serving, myopic pursuit of profit encourages hedonistic, materialistic, individualistic lifestyles. Violence stoked by religious and ethnic intolerance continues to shock us, highlighting the apparent separation of religion and ethnicity from basic humanity. In these modern times, it is a sad indictment of humankind that our huge advancements in science and technology have not been matched by the development of our moral values. However, the ethical principles set out in the SS provide a roadmap to ensure that our material development does not outstrip our spiritual development. As Maxim points out, our ethics - at the individual, organisational, social, national and international levels - play a decisive role in supporting a community-based attitude responsible for keeping the above-mentioned challenges of our knowledge-based society in check [12]. Therefore, the practise of *dharma* in relation to ethics draws on ancient teachings that provide immense benefit to humankind.

Observing the facts, the root cause of our modern-day problems appears to lie firmly in our lack of guidance on how individuals, communities, societies, and nations should regulate themselves for the benefit of others via following ethical principles. Collectively, we seem to be obsessed with developing and improving our material world to the detriment of developing our humanity in thought, speech, and actions. Physically, while individuals - and indeed nations - may have great strength to face life's challenges, without spiritual guidance, they remain morally weak. Corruption, in all its various forms and modes of expression, is especially prevalent in developing countries is due to this lack of moral conscience. Shaping a national character that espouses the intrinsically humane values outlined by *dharma* seems to be lost amongst the ever-expanding pursuit of Science and technology, which is so often associated with encouraging the adoption of the hedonistic, materialistic and individualistic lifestyles that have caused a global pandemic of depression, social isolation and community disintegration.

Indeed, it is all too easy to become lost in the vast complexities of life without a firm moral underpinning to guide us in coping with our problems. As Magnani points out: "Living morally is the capacity to apply a kind of cognition

able to provide valuable moral knowledge and skilful templates which can explain behaviours, duties, and options, and to provide suitable deliberations. Moral deliberations relate to a sort of selection or creation of principles and to their application to concrete cases. We can both just select (or create, if we do not have any) moral principles and apply them to concrete cases or looking for the best ones among them according to some ethical meta-criteria.” [13, p. 18]

Therefore, every nation strives for ethical values originating in its own traditions to cope with the negative aspects of its scientific and technological development.

4. Conclusions

Dharma is vast and complex: each spiritual tradition has reinterpreted its teachings based on its own particular standpoint. That said, *dharma* remains an all-pervading universal principle; as well as providing us with the moral fortitude to deal with life’s challenges and uniting communities and nations, it also provides a practical set of guidelines that can help us achieve perfection in spiritual life. The Sanskrit-Old Javanese text SS is a celebrated treatise on ethics that discusses *dharma* by centralising morally recommended practices (*śubha karma*), moral prohibitions (*aśubha karma*) and the effects of performing them. In addition to discussing *dharma* from a moral perspective, the SS also sets out the importance of the four goals in life (viz. *catur puruṣārtha* - namely, *dharma* (the ‘right way of living’), *artha* (wealth), *kāma* (desire) and *mokṣa* (spiritual release)), since the achievement and enjoyment of *artha* (wealth) and *kāma* (desire) are meaningless without a commitment to following *dharma*’s moral teachings. Similarly, the *Tri-kāyas* (the three kinds of action) are rendered meaningless - and potentially harmful in terms of causing unnecessary suffering - without the spirit of *dharma* to guide them. By performing *dharma* as set out in the SS, the goals of life can be attained; when the values of *dharma* can be identified and encouraged, they can contribute to the betterment of the individual, community, society, nation-state, and ultimately, the world as a whole.

In conclusion, while much time and energy have been devoted to the advancement of Science, technology and the resultant prosperity and freedom that arises, these advances have been largely devoid of spiritual guidance as to how these gifts to humanity should be managed to ensure maximum benefit and mitigate potential harm. At the individual level, developing one’s own ethical and moral integrity requires an established and worthy set of ethical teachings and principles, of which *dharma* is unparalleled. On this basis, the author asserts that the *dharmic* principles set out in the SS provide an ideal blueprint for developing Science and technology alongside ensuring that the ethical principles of dignity and welfare for all are upheld. *Dharma*’s basis as a set of the highest ethical values offers humankind an unsurpassed route to balance our pursuits across all domains and at all levels. The question now is how *dharma* can be

implemented to achieve the most benefit for humankind's collective modern condition, in which dharmic education plays a key role.

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