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Crisis of Dharma and Postmodern Ethics: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The concept of Dharma occupies a central position in Indian philosophical and ethical thought, encompassing moral duty, righteousness, social responsibility, and the principles that sustain individual and collective life. In contrast, postmodern ethics emerges within a philosophical context characterized by skepticism toward universal truths, fixed moral frameworks, and absolute foundations of knowledge and morality. This study presents a comparative analysis of the crisis of Dharma and the ethical uncertainties associated with postmodern thought. It examines how traditional understandings of duty, morality, social order, and individual responsibility encounter challenges in contemporary societies marked by pluralism, globalization, technological change, and rapidly shifting value systems. The study explores selected Indian philosophical perspectives on Dharma alongside major themes in postmodern ethics, including moral plurality, contextuality, fragmentation, uncertainty, and the critique of universal moral claims. Particular attention is given to the tension between duty-based ethical frameworks and postmodern approaches that emphasize individual experience, difference, relational responsibility, and sensitivity to marginalized voices. The analysis suggests that the contemporary crisis of Dharma is not simply a decline of traditional morality but also reflects the difficulty of applying inherited ethical principles to complex modern situations. Similarly, postmodern ethics, despite rejecting rigid universalism, offers possibilities for developing more contextual and inclusive forms of moral responsibility. The study argues that a meaningful dialogue between Dharma and postmodern ethics can contribute to addressing contemporary moral dilemmas by combining ethical responsibility with pluralism, critical reflection, and respect for human dignity. Such a comparative approach may provide new perspectives on the reconstruction of ethical values in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Dharma, Postmodern Ethics, Indian Philosophy, Moral Crisis, Ethical Values, Moral Pluralism, Duty, Relational Ethics, Modernity, Human Responsibility.

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