**Differentiating and Complementing Sanātana Dharma with Hinduism**

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Abstract

There is no uniform belief, doctrine, or set of beliefs that all *Hindus* accept. There is no ism; it was invented for the purposes of empire. The Sanātana Dharma addresses this nature of diversity constituting the whole. Yet though Hinduism has been its main expression through history, Sanātana Dharma as a universal and eternal tradition cannot be reduced to the forms of Hinduism or to a tradition belonging only to India. Sanātana Dharma has counterparts in other lands and traditions. In fact, one can argue, wherever the higher truth is recognized, that is Sanātana Dharma, regardless of the names, forms or personalities involved. To counter such attempts to limit Hinduism and to bring its teachings out for the benefit of all, we need to consider Sanātana Dharma as a complementary to Hinduism. Such a global projection of Sanātana Dharma does not deny the importance of Hinduism as central to India, its culture, its past and its future. However, it emphasizes a global and expansive Hinduism, not one that contracts itself according to geographical or ethnic boundaries. Such a bold assertion of Sanātana Dharma makes Hinduism relevant to all peoples, all religions, and all cultures. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the conceptual distinction between Sanātana Dharma and Hinduism, along with highlighting the complementary nature of both, for an intact identity of India as a nation at global platform.

1. **Introduction**

The words *Sanātana Dharma* and *Hinduism* are used by many well intentioned writer almost interchangeably. While one may be ready to accept that modern usage does not always honor meanings of words, and indeed, changes meanings of words, tend to agree with our ancient grammarians that while the speech of clarity brings blessings and prosperity, misleading speech (such as that of our politicians & advertisers) does not.  Sanātana Dharma and Hinduism are not the same.  Far from it.  My purpose here is to demonstrate a clear difference in meaning. Scholars and people in general, often read that the translation the traditional Hindu might provide for Hinduism would be Sanātana Dharma, or that the traditional Hindu expression Sanātana Dharma could be translated as Hinduism1.

The word Hinduism is often used today, both inside and outside of India, as more of an identifier of the indigenous religion of India and even it is quiet useful for the sake of simplicity and economy of expression.  However, considering the difference between the words, with a bit of history, and in terms of the metaphysics of the words themselves. It’s the suffix *ism* attached to the word Hindu that plays and important role at conceptual level. As all English language speakers instinctively know as part of their meta-language is that *ism* signifies a particular and somewhat singular idea or belief.  Commun*ism*, vegetarian*ism*, pacif*ism*, consumer*ism*, ethnocentr*ism*. All these words lead back to believing or following a particular idea. The word *Hindu* has been used meaning *Indian,* until the suffix *ism* was attached by the British in the 19th century. Almost immediately, the West shifted the meaning of Hindu away from it geographical identity and towards a particular and singular religious identity, which in the post-enlightenment West meant a belief, a doctrine.  (Rampuri. 2005).

The Sanātana Dharma2, on the other hand, is not overly concerned with ideas and belief.  Traditionally Sanātana Dharma signifies the dynamic sum of the knowledge, of all the diverse traditions of *Bharat Matā*, or Greater Hindustan, if you will, since the beginning of time.  It is not the subject of knowledge (or the means by which it may be obtained – as in an *ism*), but the object of knowledge.  It is not something one man or woman can put their hands around, or know or master in a lifetime.  There are no single idea of that address the Sanātana Dharma as a whole, but rather interpretations and commentaries of small parts of it.  Even the word *dharma* is used today very largely within the framework of the European post-enlightenment category of religion, while, actually, traditional people think of dharma much in the same way modern people think of science.

The British added the *ism*to*Hindu* as a means of representing the Hindu, homogenizing, standardizing, and reducing the Hindu to a defined set of beliefs (the doctrine), defined scriptures (the text), and deity (measured against a monotheistic standard).  Thus, Hinduism, as defined by the British and others (certainly with a great deal of Indian indigenous read *Brahmin* input), could comfortably fit within the Euro post-enlightenment categories, and on the Imperial grid of all things. What one would expect to find in such a culture is *diversity*, which is the name of *Indian* culture today as it was thousands of years ago in the time of the *Rishis*. The uniformity and obedience to doctrine that the monotheist religions demand has always been conspicuously absent from Hindustan, as great thinking has always been marked by great debates and commentaries, and oral tradition has avoided the rigid limitations and authority of the printed text. *Śāstra,* of course, does not refer to a limited text, nor a printed text, even if a printed text may be included in *śāstra*.  *Śāstra* and most, if not all, sacred texts and Hindu scripture in the traditions of the Sanātana Dharma come from oral tradition.

There is no uniform belief, doctrine, or set of beliefs that all Hindus accept. There is no ism; it was invented for the purposes of empire. The Sanātana Dharma addresses this nature of diversity constituting the whole. Yet though Hinduism has been its main expression through history, Sanātana Dharma as a universal and eternal tradition cannot be reduced to the forms of Hinduism or to a tradition belonging only to India. Sanātana Dharma has counterparts in other lands and traditions. In fact, one can argue, wherever the higher truth is recognized, that is Sanātana Dharma, regardless of the names, forms or personalities involved. If we look at the ancient world prior to the predominance of western monotheistic traditions, we find much that resembles Hinduism and Sanātana Dharma, whether among the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Celts, Persians, Chinese or Mayas to name but a few. India is the land in which Sanātana Dharma has taken the deepest root and maintained its best continuity. Hinduism is the religion in which Sanātana Dharma has best survived. However, Sanātana Dharma is relevant to all peoples and must be recognized throughout the world for the planet to achieve its real potential for the unfoldment of consciousness. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the conceptual distinction between Sanātana Dharma and Hinduism, along with highlighting the complementary nature of both, for an intact identity of India as a nation.

1. **Basics of Dharma and Sanātana Dharma**

When it comes to understanding the meaning of Sanātana Dharma, one has to be aware of its Sanskrit definition. The root of the word *dharma* comes from *dhri*, which means to uphold or maintain. The Sanskrit says “*dharayati iti dharmaha*, which translates as dharma is that which upholds. However, not only what is supported is dharma, but that which does the supporting is also dharma, “*dhriyate iti dharmaha*. Therefore, dharma consists of both the force that sustains as well as what is sustained. It can also be said that there is the path of dharma as well as its conclusion, the object of dharma, or what we are seeking, the goal of life. Therefore, dharma is the means as well as the goal.

Dharma is also said to be the force, which maintains the universe. Where there is dharma, there is harmony and balance individually, socially, and inter-galactically. The path of dharma brings about the harmony and contentment that is another aspect of what one is seeking. In this way, one wants harmony inwardly, in one’s own consciousness, but one also cannot have individual peace unless there is harmony or cooperation socially, amongst the masses. So where there is no dharma, there is disharmony and a state of being that is out of balance. Moreover, socially it means that without dharma, there is a lack of cooperation, along with escalating quarrel and fighting. This often manifests as a lack of distribution of resources, whereas some parts of the world may experience abundance of water, food, or fuel, yet other parts are starving. When one acts against the law of dharma, one disrupts the very harmony and cooperation that one wants. In other words, one create a life for oneself in which there is stress, confusion, discontent, and frustration. In addition, when one feels that way, which becomes one’s contribution to the general social condition. It is the exact opposite of what one wish to attain. Thus, to live a life outside of dharma means to work against oneself.

The practice of dharma should be done not out of compulsion but out of love due to the perception of the Supreme in all living beings. With this motivation, dharma can assist in preventing injury to others and treating each other respectfully. Dharma also means righteous conduct. This includes following social laws and proper moral activity and behavior. It encourages truthfulness of thought, word, and deed. The point of which is to reach the goal of dharma. Dharma also means truth. So one follows the path of dharma to free oneself from illusion and reach the ultimate Truth, which is the topmost reality, the spiritual strata. The Absolute Truth means the final philosophical goal and end of all knowledge, which is God, the Supreme Being. So when one wants to attain liberation from material existence, after realizing the futility of its temporary nature, and wish to reach God, then it becomes much easier to follow the path of dharma and overcome the temptations of the temporary material world. Then one can let go of the illusory objects that are, in fact, hurdles on the path to Truth and God, and happiness in general.

Furthermore, if one lives based on lust and greed, to accumulate possessions, money, and sensual pleasure by the demands of the mind and senses, it will become most difficult to follow the path of dharma. Of course, when this is the case, one often see that such people become increasingly discontent and out of balance, enamored by the illusory happiness in material existence. Doing what should not be done is called *vidharma*, which is a type of *adharma* or *nondharmic* activity. The conclusion, therefore, is that if one wants happiness and peace one must learn how to live according to the path of dharma. On a national, ethnic, or racial level, dharma is an instrument of unity, not divisiveness. That which helps unite everyone and develop love and universal brotherhood, is dharma. That which causes discord or disharmony or provokes hatred is *adharma*. That which works against or tries to destroy dharma is *adharma*. So we can see that the path of dharma is more of a way of life. Some people may say that *Vedic* dharma, or Hinduism, is another religion. Yet, if we understand this principle of dharma, we can see that it is not merely another religion or “ism”. It is a way of life that is lived with every moment and every breath. It is a matter of raising our consciousness to the highest level possible. It is a matter of understanding and living according to the Universal Spiritual principles that apply to everyone. Thus, we reach our fullest potential, which in the end is on the spiritual platform.

The more one is attracted to the material existence and in accumulating the illusory objects to satisfy one’s mind and senses, in essence, the more hurdles one is bringing into one’s life. One must overcome these obstructions at some point to reach the Absolute Truth. Therefore, life lived according to the law of dharma means the freer one becomes from false obstacles, from stress, from false hang-ups, mood swings, and inner conflicts. Thus, the freer one is to experience one’s real self as spiritual beings, and the more society chooses to follow the path of dharma, the more easily one can attain an existence of cooperation and harmony instead of one of wars, conflict, terror and killing. So whatever one does, even if it is doing business, making money, politics, etc., it should be done on the basis of dharma. Then things will progress in the proper way. Following dharma will bring both material well-being as well as final liberation from material existence. Thus, one can attain all that this world can offer through the path of dharma.

For example, when one comes to the level of dharma, then all of his or her actions are in accordance with the dharma, the path of harmony and balance, in tune with the Divine. For example, in Vedic culture one can find the artful expression of dance. This is just one of many art forms in the Vedic tradition. But on the path of dharma it is an expression of one’s emotional outlet toward God, *Īśvara*. An emotional outlet in this manner means you express yourself to God, you release your love for God, and your thoughts and consciousness become more absorbed in God. So this is also like yoga, a form of dedicated meditation. In this way, the attitude within the dance is unique. It is not merely an emotional release for satisfying one’s own mind, but it is an expression of longing toward becoming united with God. That is yoga. It is dharma. So in this sense, dharma means the freedom to naturally express our inner proclivity, which is to get closer to the Absolute Truth, and worship this Truth, this *Īśvara* or God. Therefore, on the path of dharma the dances, the movements, the costumes and jewelry, are all used to either relate the pastimes of God or to enhance our attachment to God. These are all expressions of dharma, our eternal nature to love God and be loved by God. Thus, dharma is also protected by continuing the tradition. For this reason there needs to be a class of men who are dedicated to protect the dharma. It is only one who has the dharma that can protect it.

Now when we add the word *Sanātana* to dharma, it expands the meaning and purpose. *Sanātana* means eternal. Sanātana Dharma can mean the ancient path that has existed from time immemorial. It is the eternal path which has been given to humanity and comes from beyond the material dimension. Thus, Sanātana-dharma is the inter-dimensional path of progress for all living beings. It can also be said to be the unceasing and imperishable path of the soul. Sanātana dharma also means the eternal path and our eternal nature. Dharma means the ultimate nature of the living being, the spirit soul. The nature or dharma of the soul is to love and be loved, to serve its most lovable object, and to receive love. Just like the dharma or nature of sugar is to be sweet, we know that if it is not sweet or if it is salty, then it is not sugar. The dharma of fire is to give light and heat. If it does not do that, then it cannot be fire. So the Sanātana-dharma or eternal nature of the soul is that it is a spiritual being that is naturally connected to God and feels the greatest joy in its constitutional position as a servant of God. The soul needs to love. It cannot do without it. And on nature as human beings reflects the nature of the soul because one is always looking for love. Although when such love is interpreted through the mind and senses, it is often accepted as the satisfaction of the mind and body. This only brings temporary happiness because it is merely a reflection of what we really want and need. So for the soul, the most lovable object is the Lord and the most pleasing things are spiritual relations and exchanges. This is what will give the epitome of bliss that we long for in loving relationships.

Sanātana-dharma is also a matter of understanding. It is an awareness that every particle of this universe is an expansion of God’s energies. That it is all an exhibition of the potencies of the Para-Brahman, the Absolute Existence. Dharma is the path to seeing how God is everywhere. Thus, dharma is not only the path to God but is also in God. A truly liberated person does not worry about liberation, or in going home back to God in the spiritual world. He is already aware that he is in God’s energy, whether it is the material or spiritual energy. It is all an exhibition of God’s potencies wherever he goes. Thus, the *dharmic*, the follower of dharma who sees God everywhere, is already home. Liberation from material existence will follow such a person like a servant. If one understands this properly, one can see that Sanātana Dharma is the basis of universal truth. It can be applied to anyone at anytime and anywhere in the universe. Thus, many religions can and should include Sanātana Dharma within their approach and outlook. It does not matter in which religion you may be affiliated, you can still benefit and grow within the fold of Sanātana Dharma to reach a higher awareness and perception of your true potential and genuine spiritual identity. In this way, the whole world could reach a new stage in its social and spiritual development, as well as in harmony and cooperation.

The history of the term “Sanātana Dharma” runs through the entire Indian scriptural tradition. It is mentioned in the *Dhammapada*, the *Manusmṛti*, and in the Epics. It has been of importance in homogenizing Vaiṣṇavism in the eighteenth century (Horstmann 2005) and has been revisited in the nineteenth century by Brāhmo Samājīs, Ārya Samājīs, Sanātana Dharma Sabhās (see Jones 1976: 27–29; Lutgendorf (1991: 360–71), Theosophists,3 Gandhi, and many reform movements. Whereas the term “Sanātana Dharma” (“eternal religion”) refers nowadays to a self-designation of “Hinduism” by Hindus implying that the *dharma* is eternal, the term “sanātanist” pertains to those who rigidly adhere to traditional law and what is defined as “traditional and correct law” varies depending on the tradition or group one belongs to. Thus, most reform Hindu movements see their interpretation of “Hinduism” as an expression of Sanātana Dharma, but do not consider themselves sanātanists*.* In this sense, it would be appropriate to distinguish between Sanātana Dharma in the narrow sense, that is, sanātanist *dharma*, and Sanātana Dharma in the broad sense, that is, the eternal true religion, claimed equally by *sanātanī* Hindus, the Theosophical Society, Ārya Samājists, Gandhi, and adherents of many other reform traditions and movements of modern Hinduism, in other words, by most Hindus as a designation for their systems of belief. For instance, when scholars discuss the Ārya-Sanātanist controversy, they imply Sanātana Dharma in the narrow sense (see Jones 1976: 26, 111, 189–93). However, they have to acknowledge that “tracing the growth of the Sanatan Dharm Sabhas and Ārya Samajes can prove difficult, since both claimed that they were the ‘eternal,’ i.e. Sanātan Religion.…The distinction of name is not only useless, but inconvenient and even positively illegible” (Jones 1976: 111n56).

1. **Elaborating the Difference between Sanātana Dharma and Hinduism**

The Sanskrit term *Sanātana Dharma* can be translated in a variety of ways. ‘Eternal religion’ or ‘eternal law’ (Klostermaier 1989:31, 530), ‘unshakeable, venerable order’ (Halbfass 1990:344), and ‘ancient and continuing guideline’ (Lipner 1994:221) are all examples. These attempts to capture the meaning of a Hindu concept in English are most commonly accompanied by references to the textual usage of the term which give a sense of its nuanced deployment within the Hindu tradition (see, for example, Lutgendorf 1991:363). At the same time an awareness is also frequently expressed of the development of this term into a more amorphous signifier of Hinduism as a religion, distinct from other religions. Sanātana Dharma has been noted as evoking a rather dubious homogeneity in Hinduism, while at the same time contributing to the avoidance of any clear articulation of how that homogeneity is constituted (see Halbfass 1990:344–5; Lipner 1994:221). As Lipner proclaims, ‘I have yet to discover a Hindu *sanātana-dharma* in the sense of some universally recognised philosophy, teaching or code of practice. Indeed there can be no such thing, for it presupposes that Hinduism is a monolithic tradition in which there is agreement about some static, universal doctrine . . . [rather than] . . . a pluriform phenomenon in which there are many dynamic centres of religious belief and practice’ (Lipner 1994:221).

This articulation of Sanātana Dharma as a signifier of amorphous homogeneity has been associated with what Halbfass calls the ‘self-representation of Hinduism which grew out of its encounter with the West’ (Halbfass 1990:344). The notion of ‘growth’ is particularly significant here, as there is no doubt that the meaning of the term has shifted considerably over the past two centuries. ‘A plethora of positions’, Halbfass continues, ‘have been defended and propagated under this title’. One position in particular appears as a prominent feature of modern Hinduism in accounts of political and social history. Indeed, no history of nineteenth-century India is complete without reference to the emergence of various Sabhas designed to protect or promote *sānatana dharma*.

Thousands of years before the term Hindu or Hinduism came into existence, the term ‘Sanātana Dharma’ finds reference in Veda the oldest literature in the world. The duties as mentioned above can be classified into Sanātana Dharma and *Varṇaāśrama* Dharma. *Varṇaāśrama* Dharma identifies the economic and social duties of human beings. Sanātana Dharma consists of duties which are typically spiritual in nature. It refers to *ātman* or spirit and thus cannot vary from person to person. Sanātana Dharma is very difficult to define objectively. However, the emphasis is on eternal or intrinsic inclination of human beings which is to do service as desired by God and without expecting anything in return. This, according to Rishis is universal and beyond life and death and has nothing to do with one’s belier system. It prescribes the eternal duties that human beings should follow irrespective of birth root. These duties are honesty, purity, non-violence, self-restraint etc.

The term Hindu does not find mention in ancient literatures like *Vedas* and *Purāṇa*. It has been coined by *Persians* to mean people living beside the river *Sindhū*. Basically Hindu means the people living in a particular geographical territory, i.e. Indians living beside *Sindhū river*. Before Persians gave Indians the name Hindu, the geographical territory was known as *Āryāvarta*. When Greek conqueror Alexander the great invaded this part of the world, Greeks used the term *Indu* instead of Hindu to denote people living in this territory. This *‘Indu’* later became India and the people came to be known as Indian. During the period when Muslim rulers ruled India, they levied *jazia*, a discriminatory tax upon all non- Muslims, thus bracketing all non-Muslims living in India as a distinct religious and cultural denomination called Hindu. Later during 19th century *‘Hindu’* became to be recognized as Hindu religion engulfing the people of India and the Sanātana Dharma. Even today, in many countries Muslims and Christians from India are termed as Hindu-Muslims and Hindu-Christians respectively.

The root of Hindu Dharma is found in *Vedas* and *purāṇa*. These books are collection of spiritual laws, discovered by Rishis. These laws are absolute and govern the spiritual world. With passage of time it became a complex tradition encompassing a number of inter-related faiths and practices with common characteristics. The underlying theme of *Hindu Dharma* is that a human being’s life both present and future is guided by the action or *karma* one undertakes. Hindu Dharma is a mystical religion that teaches the practitioners to experience the truth within by way of *Karma* (action), *Bhakti* (devotion), and *Jñāna* (wisdom), and feel oneness with God in death. Hindu Dharma as commonly known is a synthesis of a number of beliefs and traditions, like *Vaiṣṇavism*, *Śaiva, Śāktaḥ, Shikhism, Jainism* etc. Hindu Dharma as practiced today by nearly 1.15 billion people spread over Indian subcontinent, and many parts of Asia consists of certain rituals, festivals, and strict customs. It is the third largest religion in the world after Christianity and Buddhism. Today Hinduism is a political force, synonymous with national identity of India.

Through the course of time and human limitations, Hinduism may have taken on various elements which do not reflect this eternal essence of universal truth. However, the power of Sanātana Dharma continues behind the Hindu tradition, particularly in its *Yoga* and *Vedānta* spiritual forms, providing it with a depth, breadth, and vitality that perhaps no other spiritual tradition on Earth is able to sustain. One can find in Hinduism all the main religious teachings of the world from nature worship, to theism, to the formless Absolute. One can find practices of devotion, yoga, mantra, and meditation in a great plethora of expressions, including the world’s most sophisticated spiritual philosophies of self-realization. Hinduism is not anchored to any single prophet, book or historical revelation that can tie down the expanse of its vision. It does not subordinate the individual to an outer religious authority, but encourages everyone to discover the Divine within their own awareness.

Indeed, if one were to synthesize all the existing religions of the world, one would end up with a teaching much like Hindu Dharma. Hinduism has the devotional theism of western religions, the karma theory and meditation practices of Buddhism, and the nature worship of native traditions, all unified at a deep philosophical and experiential level into one harmonious fabric. Hinduism appears like the common root from which these various religious expressions have diversified or perhaps, departed. One then may ask, “If Hinduism is an expression of Sanātana Dharma, why does it appear to be limited to India like a local ethnic religion, rather than a universal approach?” The first thing to realize in this regard is that a universal approach will always seek to create local forms. For example, a universal approach to diet will encourage people to eat the local food that has the best nutritional content. It will not emphasize the same food items for people in all lands and climates.

However, besides its connection to Sanātana Dharma, India has another side, much like many other countries and cultures. There are divisive forces that deny this dharmic cultural unity, whether in the name of political ideologies like Marxism, other religious traditions like Christianity and Islam, or sectarian trends within Hinduism itself. Even Hindu society too, frequently see an emphasis on clan, family, and community that overrides any greater national interests or even the greater needs of Hinduism itself. This narrow vision can reduce Hindu Dharma to an Indian tradition only, or it can emphasize one Hindu sect or guru while ignoring the greater background of Sanātana Dharma.

One encounters this problem particularly when non-Indians seek to become Hindus. They are often told that one must be born a Hindu and cannot convert to Hinduism, which is not true historically or Hinduism could have never spread so far as it has. We also see this problem with Hindus who have migrated outside of India. They form their own religious communities, which is admirable, but do not make much of an effort to bring non-Indians into these, even when such individuals may approach them seeking to join Hindu Dharma. This further gives the impression that Hinduism is a religion for a particular ethnic group only, not a universal path. It can turn away westerners who have a genuine receptivity to Sanātana Dharma.

1. **Sanātana Dharma as Complementary to Hinduism for Restructuring Identity of India**

Major historical changes in the economic and political institutions of India during the Tur co-Afghan conquest, the Mughal invasion, the consolidation of the Mughal polity, and the establishment of the British colonial regime undoubtedly effected important changes in the religious traditions of India, but the rapid changes of early colonial times never had such an overwhelming impact that they could have led to the invention of Hinduism. Hinduism wasn't invented sometime after 1800, or even around the time of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. What did happen during the centuries of rule by dynasties of Muslim sultans and emperors was that Hindus developed a consciousness of a shared religious identity based on the loose family resemblance among the variegated beliefs and practices of Hindus, whatever their sect, caste, chosen deity, or theological school (Lorenzen 1999).

To counter such attempts to limit Hinduism and to bring its teachings out for the benefit of all, we need a revival of Hinduism as complementary to Sanātana Dharma, the eternal or universal tradition, for the entire planet. Such a global projection of Sanātana Dharma does not deny the importance of Hinduism as central to India, its culture, its past and its future. But it emphasizes a global and expansive Hinduism, not one that contracts itself according to geographical or ethnic boundaries. Such a bold assertion of Sanātana Dharma makes Hinduism relevant to all peoples, all religions and all cultures. It removes Hinduism from being restricted to local forms or controlled by the dictates of any particular group. This expansive Sanātana Dharma will naturally honor India and seek a revival of Hinduism in India. But it will do so with a global vision and a linking up with Hindus and dharmic groups worldwide.

There have already been important movements in this in direction. In fact, one can argue that the global spread of Hindu teachings like *Yoga*, *Vedānta* and *Ayurveda* is a sign of Sanātana Dharma arising at a global level. Gurus from India and their teachings have spread to all countries. Unfortunately, many modern teachers from India have left the greater portion of Hinduism behind in their attempt to gain a broader recognition, to the extent of denying their Hindu roots and not educating their disciples in the greater Hindu tradition, its importance and its values. Instead of honoring the Hindu connection with Sanātana Dharma, they promote an artificial unity of all religions that puts Hindu views and practices in the background or ignores them altogether.

Such teachers state that people can add the spiritual practices of the Hindu tradition, like *Yoga* and *Vedānta*, on to any other cultural or religious foundation. They do not encourage people to study and honor the Hindu tradition itself but rather to stay within their own culture’s religious tradition, even if it is anti-Hindu. They do not emphasize Hinduism’s special connection to Sanātana Dharma, but try to make Hindus feel that all other religions are the same as their own and no real differences exist between them. In this regard, such teachers of universal spirituality are making a mistake in their understanding of dharma. Sanātana Dharma is not just a spiritual path or what is called a *Mokṣa Dharma*, a way of liberation. Sanātana Dharma shows a dharmic way for all aspects of life starting with personal life-style practices, to the family, education, business, intellectual culture and even politics (all the spheres of [*Puruṣārtha*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puru%E1%B9%A3%C4%81rtha)*; dharma, artha, kāma* and *mokṣa)4.*

Unfortunately, the teachers who try to universalize the *Mokṣa Dharma* of Hinduism and apply it to all religions leave out the other aspects of Dharma, which includes the dharmic foundation for both social and individual life. A new resurgent global Hinduism complemented by Sanātana Dharma will project all aspects of dharma and not be limited to a *Mokṣa Dharma*. It is important that we replace this *“radical universalism”* of all religions being the same, which is a misinterpretation and diminution of Sanātana Dharma, with a global Hindu and dharmic resurgence that affirms Sanātana Dharma as both a spiritual path and a way of life on all levels.

It is not only *Yoga* and *Vedānta* that have universal value, so does the foundation of Hindu Dharma on all levels. This includes Hindu rituals, which are a science of interacting with the cosmic forces, Hindu temples and holy places which are conduits for cosmic energy, Vedic sciences like *Ayurveda*, *Vedic astrology* and *Vāstu*, Hindu music and dance and other Hindu art forms. These outer aspects of Hindu or dharmic living can be developed and adapted in different cultural contexts but their basic principles are as enduring as the great truth of *Vedānta* that there is only one Self in all beings.On this foundation of dharmic living, both in terms of our outer culture and our inner spiritual practices, people from all lands and cultures can embrace Sanātana Dharma. They can find in Hindu thought a model for an authentic dharmic culture and spirituality that addresses their own individual, social and environmental needs, which they can use to restructure their lives as way of Self-realization. In that dharmic approach, all divisive religious identities will disappear into a greater unity of consciousness, not only with other human beings, but with the entire universe.

1. **Conclusion**

Whatever helps the evolving soul to cultivate qualities which bring it nearer and nearer to God and finally enables it to realise oneness with Divinity is its dharma ; and whatever obstructs and retards this process of self-realisation or God realization is adharma. To those who deny the reality of the human soul and its potential divinity, dharma and adharma would be words without meaning. They can never transcend the idea that the promo tion of personal and social welfare is the highest gbal of human life. They uphold the secular philsophy of life according to which the summum bonum of life is the pursuit of the greatest amount of happiness (Suda1970).

Sanātana-dharma means both the ultimate spiritual truth and the means to attain it. And that truth is the divine knowledge of the soul. Thus, if there is to be any eternality in our relationships, or any spiritual connection with anything we do, it has to be based on that divine knowledge of the soul, the ultimate reality. That is the path of Sanātana-dharma, to realize our spiritual identity and then know how to act accordingly. Therefore, the purpose of life is to follow the path of dharma which will bring one to the conclusion of recognizing that everything is the energy of God, Brahman. Following this further, the path of dharma will bring us into union with God. And the highest union is through love and devotion, or *bhakti*. Thus, bhakti-yoga, the process of loving devotion to the Lord, is the epitome of following Sanātana-dharma. Making this the goal of our life means that we are living a life of dharma. The ultimate goal of dharma is to reach God.

There has never been any such a thing as a single 'Hinduism' or any single 'Hindu community' for all of India. Nor, for that matter, can one find any such thing as a single 'Hinduism' or 'Hindu community' even for any one socio-cultural region of the continent. Furthermore, there has never been any one religion,nor even one system of religions to which the term 'Hindu' can accurately be applied. No one so-called religion, moreover, can lay exclusive claim to or be defined by the term 'Hinduism.' The very notion of the existence of any single religious community by this name has been falsely conceived (Frykenberg 1989: 29). If Hinduism is a construct or invention, then, it is not a colonial one, nor a European one, nor even an exclusively Indian one. It is a construct or invention only in the vague and commonsensical way that any large institution is, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, communism, or parliamentary democracy. In other words, it is an institution created out of a long historical interaction between a set of basic ideas and the infinitely complex and variegated socio religious beliefs and practices that structure the everyday life of individuals and small, local groups.

Sanātana Dharma will always create a great diversity of local forms, and never aim at uniformity. Uniformity is not a sign if universality, but of artificiality. Dharma is not a set of fixed beliefs or practices but a way of adaptation to the living truth that is always changing in form though one in law and principle. Even in India we see a great deal of local diversity in how Hinduism is presented and expressed in the different parts of the country. This variety that exists within Hinduism is probably greater than the variety found within any other religion. Yet through all of this diversity there remains a clear unity of Hindu thought and culture. Sanātana Dharma is central to the soul of India as a nation. India’s place in human history is to function as the global guru or spiritual guide rooted in Sanātana Dharma as Sri Aurobindo once eloquently proclaimed. The traditional culture of India is infused with yoga, meditation and experiential spirituality of all types. This means that India cannot flourish as a country without a recognition of Sanātana Dharma and an honoring of its values on all levels of India’s culture.

**Notes**

1. ‘Hinduism’ is also the byproduct of a British colonial administrative decision to divide up the populace into various ‘communities’ defined by religion­­­­­—Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and so on (see Frykenberg 1993; Pandey 2006; Thapar 1989).

2. It may be granted that in traditional and largely Sanskritic texts these are not the terms used. It is, however, debatable at the very least as to whether Sanskritic terms like ‘*sanātana dharma’* and *'vaidika dharma’* cannot, with the proper concessions to historical, cultural, and ideological specificity, be comparable to and translated as 'Hinduism' or 'the Hindu religion.' Conversely, terms like *‘bauddha dharma’* found already in 'Hindu' texts dating from before the Common Era, might very well be adequately translated as 'the Buddhist religion.'

3.The interpretation of the concept of Sanātana Dharma by the Theosophical Society is best revealed in the textbooks written for the Central Hindu College in Benaras. Two such textbooks are *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (CHC 1904a) and *Sanātana-Dharma: An Elementary Text-Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (CHC 1904b).

4. In traditional Vedic scriptures, it is supposed that all human aims at [Puruṣārtha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puru%E1%B9%A3%C4%81rtha). [Puruṣārtha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puru%E1%B9%A3%C4%81rtha) can be grouped under four headings. (1) Dharma is the aim of living in accord with all the various rules that apply to a person in a particular class, stage in life, and simply as a human being. As an aim in life, rather than as a rule of conduct, dharma refers to "being established in dharma." To become established in dharma it is necessary to develop the habit of observing the relevant particular dharmas or moral rules. This is analogous to virtue, for if one aims at virtue, in the sense of living a virtuous life, then it is necessary to perform virtuous actions as a matter of character. (2) Artha is the aim of securing the various stuffs of life-such as food, shelter, power, etc.-that are requisite for a full human life in society. (3) Kāma is the aim of attaining satisfaction of wants and desires. (4) Mokṣa is the aim of being completely free from whatever is imperfect and binding.( Koller1 972).

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