

**INDIC ETHICS-TO-GOVERNANCE MODEL (IEGM): DHARMA
ṚTA - VYAVASTHĀ (DRV) FRAMEWORK*****Dr. Narendra Vijayasimha**

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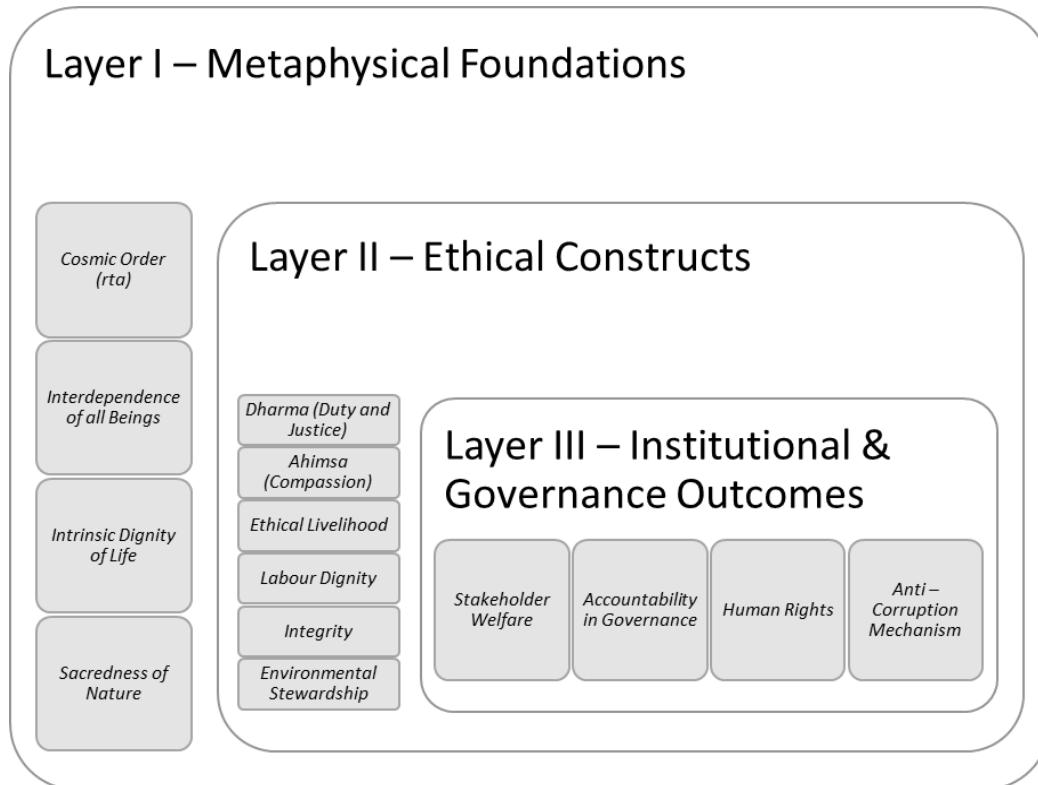
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Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.8164>**ABSTRACT**

This paper presents the Indic Ethics-to-Governance Model (IEGM), also designated as the Dharma-Ṛta-Vyavasthā (DRV) framework, establishing a textually grounded theoretical model that traces the flow of foundational Indic metaphysics into ethical norms and operational institutional governance. Drawing exclusively from canonical sources across Vedantic, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions, the framework demonstrates a shared civilisational architecture wherein reality is understood as inherently ordered, interdependent, and sacred. The model is structured into three interconnected conceptual layers. Layer I establishes the metaphysical foundations of Indic thought through principles such as ṛta (cosmic order), Brahman-Atman identity, universal jīva (sentience), paṭicca-samuppāda (dependent origination), and Ik Onkar (divine immanence), which collectively ground human dignity, systemic reciprocity, and ecological reverence. Layer II translates these cosmological realities into core ethical constructs, including dharma (righteous duty), ahimsa (non-violence), right livelihood, stewardship, and personal integrity. Layer III details the historical manifestation of these ethics into formal institutional outcomes, such as self-regulating labour guilds (śreṇi), welfare structures, ecological management systems, and administrative anti-corruption mechanisms. By demonstrating how metaphysical commitments organically produce institutional accountability, the IEGM provides a culturally rooted, philosophically coherent foundation to enrich modern international governance paradigms, offering direct theoretical alignments with the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) pillars of human rights, labour standards, environmental sustainability, and anti-corruption.

KEYWORDS: Indic Ethics; Governance Framework; Sustainability Philosophy; United Nations Global Compact. (UNGC)

Purpose & Theoretical Framework



The purpose of the Indic Ethics-to-Governance Model (IEGM) is to develop a theoretically robust, textually grounded framework that explains how foundational metaphysical concepts across Indic traditions generate ethical norms and institutional structures capable of informing contemporary sustainability governance. Drawing exclusively on primary sources, including the Vedas, Upanishads, Jain Agamas, the Buddhist canon, and Sikh scripture, the model demonstrates that these traditions share a civilisational coherent worldview: reality is morally ordered, interdependent, and sacred, and ethical conduct arises from aligning human action with this structure. Layer I establishes the metaphysical unity of Indic thought, highlighting *ṛta*, Brahman-Atman identity, universal *jīva*, dependent origination, and *Ik Onkar* as convergent principles grounding dignity, responsibility, and ecological reciprocity. Layer II shows how these metaphysical commitments yield ethical constructs such as dharma, ahimsa, just livelihood, stewardship, and integrity. Layer III traces how these ethical constructs materialise historically in institutional arrangements, including labour guilds, monastic governance, ecological management, welfare structures, and anti-corruption mechanisms.

The model thus provides an integrated theoretical lens through which global frameworks - especially the UNGC's human rights, labour, environmental, and anti-corruption pillars - may be interpreted and strengthened through Indic civilisational resources.

In Sanskrit, the IEGM Model translates to Dharma - Rta - Vyavasthā (DRV) framework.

INTRODUCTION

The Indic Ethics-to-Governance Model (IEGM) is a tri-layered conceptual framework that articulates how foundational Indic metaphysical principles translate into ethical norms and, subsequently, into institutional structures relevant for contemporary business ethics and global governance. Rooted in the integrated philosophical heritage of Sanathana Dharma (Vedanta, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions), the model demonstrates how cosmological concepts such as *rta* (cosmic order), interdependence, and the intrinsic dignity of all beings generate coherent ethical constructs like *dharma*, *ahimsa*, justice, right livelihood, and stewardship, that provide normative guidance for individual and organisational conduct. These ethical constructs materialise further into institutional outcomes, including labour governance, ecological management, transparency regimes, and social welfare mechanisms. IEGM thus offers a culturally grounded yet universally applicable framework that aligns harmoniously with sustainability imperatives and the United Nations Global Compact, enabling organisations to embed ethical intentionality into managerial decision-making, compliance design, and governance architecture.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a conceptual–analytical methodology grounded exclusively in primary Indic texts and their internal philosophical structures. The approach involves three stages. First, a hermeneutic reading of canonical sources across the Sanathana Dharma (Vedanta, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions) identifies metaphysical principles relating to cosmic order, interdependence, consciousness, and divine immanence. These principles are examined not comparatively but synthetically, recognising the civilisational continuity evident across traditions. Second, the analysis traces how metaphysical concepts give rise to ethical norms—*dharma*, *ahimsa*, right livelihood, stewardship, and integrity—by identifying passages in which ethical injunctions are explicitly derived from ontological claims. Third, the research maps how these ethical norms historically influenced institutional formations in Indic civilisation, including labour regulation, ecological management, welfare structures, and anti-corruption mechanisms. At each stage, the

inquiry remains strictly theoretical: it does not incorporate secondary scholarship, historical debates, or empirical studies on sustainability, and it does not review other literature connecting Indic traditions to modern business ethics. Instead, the methodology demonstrates an internal civilisational logic through which metaphysics, ethics, and governance are organically linked, forming the basis for articulating a theoretical model relevant to present-day global governance frameworks such as the UNGC

Introduction to the Three-Layer Model

The three-layer Indic ethical model, comprising metaphysical foundations, ethical constructs, and institutional outcomes, offers a comprehensive civilisational framework through which the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) can be contextualised and enriched. Layer I establishes the metaphysical principles common to all Sanathana traditions, including cosmic order, interdependence, and the intrinsic dignity of all beings, which collectively ground a vision of reality that inherently supports human rights, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility (Ganguli, 1883–1896; Griffith, 1895). Layer II translates these metaphysical commitments into shared ethical constructs such as dharma, ahimsa, right livelihood, justice, and ecological restraint, thereby offering philosophical depth to UNGC areas concerning labour rights, environmental protection, and non-discrimination (Narendra Vijayasimha, 2025; Shama Sastry, 1915). Layer III further demonstrates how these ethical principles historically informed institutional arrangements across Indic civilisation, including guild-based labour regulations, monastic governance, community welfare systems, and anti-corruption mechanisms, which illustrate functional parallels to contemporary governance and compliance structures articulated in the UNGC. When viewed together, the three layers reveal a shared moral architecture that not only aligns with but also strengthens the UNGC mandate by offering a culturally rooted, spiritually grounded, and philosophically coherent basis for sustainability ethics in global governance. This integrative model shows that Indic traditions provide not merely analogues but deep civilisational resources capable of enhancing the normative, motivational, and institutional dimensions of modern sustainability frameworks (UNGC, 2000).

Layer I — Metaphysical Foundations Across Indic Traditions

The metaphysical foundations of the Indic tradition constitute one of the world's oldest and most philosophically sophisticated frameworks for understanding reality,

consciousness, and moral order. Within this broad civilisation, there are different traditions (Vedanta, Buddhist, Jaina, Sikhism, Nastika (atheist) etc). All traditions, however represent interconnected and evolving articulations of a shared Indic worldview. Although each tradition expresses its metaphysics through distinct vocabularies and emphases, they share a common orientation: the cosmos is morally structured, interdependent, and suffused with a fundamental unity that grounds ethical life. Layer I of this model articulates how these metaphysical principles provide the conceptual foundations for the ethical, institutional, and managerial constructs explored in later layers. Drawing upon Vedantic cosmology, Upanishadic non-duality, Jain ontology, Buddhist interdependence, and Sikh monistic theology, this section demonstrates that Indic metaphysics offers a comprehensive, relational, and sacred understanding of existence capable of informing contemporary ethical governance frameworks.

Ṛta, & Cosmic Order

Sanathana metaphysics begins with ṛta, the cosmic order governing both natural and moral reality. The Rig Veda describes ṛta as the principle through which the universe regulates itself harmoniously, sustaining social cohesion and ecological balance (Wilson, 1946). Ṛta functions as the deepest metaphysical principle that grounds both ethical normativity and institutional order. In the Vedantic worldview, Ṛta denotes an imminent, self-regulating cosmic order that sustains natural processes, moral coherence, and social stability. It is not merely descriptive of how the universe functions, but prescriptive in establishing the conditions under which human action remains aligned with reality. From this perspective, ethical conduct is not socially constructed but ontologically anchored. Truthfulness, justice, restraint, and responsibility arise because the cosmos itself is structured by order and balance.

IEGM interprets Ṛta as the metaphysical bridge between cosmology and governance, where deviation from ethical norms produces disorder at both societal and ecological levels. As later ethical concepts such as dharma evolve from Ṛta, governance systems become instruments for maintaining alignment between human institutions and cosmic order. Thus, Ṛta provides the metaphysical justification for integrity, accountability, and sustainability in governance frameworks.

Interdependence of all Living Beings

The Samjnana Sukta or "Hymn of Concord" (Rig Veda Book 10; Verse 191-2 to 191 -4) is the last section of Rig Veda. It is a renowned call for unity, harmony, and common purpose among humanity. It emphasizes collective well-being and agreement. It depicts human society as an extension of cosmic unity, instructing individuals to “move together, speak together, and think together,” illustrating the metaphysical roots of social harmony. This conception positions ethical life not as a human invention but as a direct reflection of cosmic law.

Intrinsic Dignity

The Upanishads deepen this metaphysical vision through the doctrine of Brahman–Atman unity, asserting that the ultimate reality (Brahman) is identical with the inner self (Atman). The mahavakya Tat Tvam Asi (“Thou art That”) in the Chāndogya Upanishad (6.9.4) establishes ontological equality across all beings, grounding dignity and non-discrimination in the substance of reality rather than social agreement (Lokeswarananda, 1998). This unity makes ethical concern an outcome of metaphysical insight: to harm another is to harm oneself (Swami Paramarthananda, 2008, pp. 160–161).

Sacredness of Nature

The Bhumi Sukta (Atharva Veda 12.1.1-63) occupies a foundational position as a metaphysical articulation of ecological order. The hymn presents Earth not merely as a physical substrate but as a living, moral, and sustaining reality whose integrity underwrites social stability, ethical conduct, and legitimate governance. From an ecological metaphysical perspective, the Bhumi Sukta extends the Vedantic concept of ṛta into a relational ontology in which natural systems, human communities, and moral order are inseparably linked (Narendra Vijayasimha, 2025).

IEGM interprets this vision as establishing the ontological basis for environmental responsibility. Earth is portrayed simultaneously as mother, witness, and juridical ground, implying that human activity must remain aligned with her regenerative capacities. The repeated appeals for forgiveness for injury caused through cultivation, mining, and extraction demonstrate an early recognition of ecological limits and moral accountability. Sustainability, in this framework, is not a technical constraint but a metaphysical obligation arising from humanity’s embeddedness within Earth’s life systems.

The Bhumi Sukta also integrates ecology with governance by linking righteous rule to harmony with the Earth’s order. Political authority is legitimate only when exercised in accordance with restraint, justice, and care for land and people alike. This alignment

anticipates contemporary sustainability governance by framing institutions as trustees rather than exploiters of ecological wealth.

Within IEGM, the Bhumi Sukta thus functions as a civilisational charter of ecological metaphysics, demonstrating how environmental ethics, social justice, and institutional responsibility emerge organically from a worldview that recognizes Earth as sacred, sentient, and morally authoritative.

Water, plants, and atmospheric elements are depicted as divine manifestations, grounding ecological responsibility in sacred ontology. Thus, Sanathana metaphysics does not separate ethics from cosmology; rather, ethical life flows naturally from a universe perceived as inherently ordered, interdependent, and alive.

Jain Metaphysics: Universal Sentience and Radical Non-Violence

Jain philosophy develops one of the most detailed metaphysical systems in Indic civilisation, centred on the ontology of *jīva* (soul) and *ajīva* (non-soul). All living beings, including insects, plants, and microscopic organisms, possess *jīva* (can also mean life), which is intrinsically conscious and capable of liberation. This universal sentience produces a metaphysics of radical moral inclusivity. Ethical obligations emerge from recognising that all beings share the same existential struggle to overcome karmic bondage (Jacobi, 1895 Vol. 2 pp. 132, 154 – 164).

The Jain doctrine of *ahimsa* derives not from moral sentiment but from ontological realism. Because every being is a centre of experience, violence is cosmically disruptive, generating karmic accretions that bind both the perpetrator and the victim. Texts such as the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* illustrate this metaphysical foundation through narratives like that of Harikesha, whose spiritual elevation despite marginal birth affirms that worth is determined not by social category but by the purity of one's *jīva* (Jacobi, 1895 Vol. 2 pp. 50 – 55). This egalitarian principle aligns with and strengthens modern discourses on equality and human dignity.

Moreover, Jain metaphysics presents a relational ontology in which all actions produce ripples across interconnected life forms. This view anticipates contemporary ecological and systems thinking by thousands of years. Resource restraint, minimal consumption, and non-exploitation are metaphysically required behaviours rather than ethical preferences (Jacobi, 1895 Vol. 2 pp. 108 – 111). Jainism thus offers a rigorously formulated cosmology that grounds environmental and social ethics in a universal ontology of consciousness.

Buddhist Metaphysics: Dependent Origination, Non-Self, and Compassion

Buddhist metaphysics diverges from the essentialist cosmologies of Vedantic and Jain traditions by proposing *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination) as the fundamental law governing existence. According to this doctrine, all phenomena arise conditionally and lack independent, permanent essence. This insight produces the dual doctrines of *anatta* (non-self) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness), which deny the existence of any fixed self while affirming the interdependence of all forms of life. In practical terms, this means that every action, however small, contributes to wider networks of causation (Harvey, 2000, pp. 31–33). Because suffering (*dukkha*) emerges from ignorance of this interdependence, ethical conduct becomes a path of metaphysical clarity. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is not merely a moral injunction but an ontological necessity arising from the shared conditioned nature of life (Harvey, 2000, pp. 54–60). The Buddhist account of reality therefore grounds ethical duties in the recognition that harm to another is structurally inseparable from harm to oneself.

Ecologically, dependent origination produces a worldview in which environmental degradation, social exploitation, and psychological suffering are interconnected expressions of the same delusion of separateness. Buddhism thus contributes a sophisticated relational metaphysics that complements the Vedantic emphasis on cosmic order and the Jain emphasis on universal sentience. Its distinctive contribution is the assertion that ethical transformation must be rooted in the dissolution of egoic identity.

Sikh Metaphysics: Ik Onkar, Divine Immanence, and Ethical Equality

Sikh metaphysics builds on the broader Indic tradition while offering a distinct theological articulation centred on *Ik Onkar* – the affirmation of One Supreme Reality manifest throughout creation. This monistic ontology is not abstract; it is directly tied to ethical demands. Because the Divine pervades all beings, social distinctions rooted in caste, gender, or status are metaphysically invalid (Singh, 2009, p. 133). The Sikh Gurus insist that spiritual realisation is inseparable from social justice, honesty, and equality.

Sikh texts describe nature as the embodiment of the Divine: air is the Guru, water the father, and Earth the mother. This poetic cosmology reinforces ecological stewardship and positions environmental care as an act of devotion. The metaphysical unity of all creation culminates in the principle of *sarbat da bhala* (the welfare of all) – grounding collective responsibility in theological insight (Singh, 2009, p. 86 – 87).

Whereas Vedanta emphasises cosmic order, Jainism consciousness, and Buddhism interdependence, Sikhism emphasises divine immanence. These perspectives collectively

demonstrate the richness and plurality of Indic metaphysics while maintaining coherence through shared themes: unity, relationality, and the sacredness of life.

Convergence: Metaphysical Unity Across the Indic Civilisation

Despite doctrinal diversity, four unifying metaphysical pillars emerge across the Indic traditions:

Ontological Interdependence

Whether expressed as ṛta, jīva networks, dependent origination, or divine immanence, all Indic traditions affirm that beings exist in mutually sustaining relationships. This relational ontology grounds ethical responsibility not in contract but in the structure of reality.

Intrinsic Value of All Life

Vedanta's unity of self and cosmos, Jain universal sentience, Buddhist compassion, and Sikh equality converge on the principle that every being possesses inherent worth.

Sacredness of the Natural World

Across texts, nature is interpreted as living, conscious, or divine. Environmental ethics flow from metaphysical commitments, not merely ethical reasoning.

Moral Law Embedded in Reality

Indic traditions reject the separation of metaphysics and ethics. Dharma, ahimsa, compassion, and justice are structurally embedded in the nature of existence.

These shared metaphysical commitments form the deep structure of Indic civilisation and support the ethical and managerial implications explored in later layers.

Layer II — Ethical Constructs Across Indic Traditions

Layer II presents the ethical superstructure that emerges from the metaphysical foundations of the Indic civilisation. Across Sanathana Dharma, ethical constructs are neither merely prescriptive nor context-specific. They arise from a cosmological understanding of duty, interconnectedness, and the sacred nature of life. Although expressed through distinct doctrinal vocabularies, these traditions share a consistent ethical orientation rooted in responsibility, restraint, care for all beings, and alignment with cosmic or divine order. This section identifies five major ethical constructs that shape Indic approaches to personal conduct, institutional behaviour, and societal governance: dharma, ahimsa, livelihood ethics, environmental stewardship, and integrity in governance. Together, they provide the moral architecture that informs the later institutional expressions of governance and managerial responsibility.

Dharma and Just Conduct Across the Indic Traditions

The concept of dharma occupies a central position within Sanathana thought. It denotes the moral, social, and cosmic order that sustains harmony across individuals and society. In the Mahābhārata, dharma is portrayed as the guiding principle for righteous action, emphasising justice, empathy, and the protection of the vulnerable (Ganguli, 1883–1896 pp. 6397–6398). Dharma is not solely a personal virtue but a collective responsibility; rulers, householders, and labourers are each expected to uphold specific duties that align with the cosmic order (Prashantha, 2018).

Jain ethical thought reframes dharma through the lens of disciplined conduct and moral purification. The Uttarādhyayana Sūtra characterises dharma as a path of restraint, self-control, and steady commitment to truth and compassion (Jacobi, 1895 p. 153 - 154). Unlike the Vedantic model, which emphasises duty in relation to social role, Jainism focuses on internal ethical discipline as the foundation for social harmony. This emphasis complements the broader Indic framework by grounding ethical duty in personal transformation.

Buddhism likewise articulates a structured ethical system known as śīla, representing moral conduct aligned with the Noble Eightfold Path. Ethical living is framed not as obligation but as a necessary condition for reducing suffering and cultivating clarity of mind. Buddhist ethics therefore deepen Indic moral thought by linking behavioural discipline with cognitive and emotional transformation (Harvey, 2000, pp. 37 - 40).

Sikhism integrates these earlier currents by conceptualising dharma as truthful living (sat), social justice, and service (seva). The Guru Granth Sahib emphasises that righteous conduct must manifest in actions that uplift the community and protect the oppressed. Unlike purely individualistic ethical models, Sikh dharma is explicitly social and egalitarian, insisting that spiritual growth is inseparable from ethical engagement in the world (Thind & Khalsa, 2012 p. 124).

Across these traditions, dharma becomes a multidimensional ethical principle: it is simultaneously personal, relational, cosmic, and institutional.

Niti-shataka and Swamy Vivekananda

Ethical governance is grounded not merely in rules or compliance mechanisms but in the disciplined formation of moral character. Traditional Indian thought, as articulated by Swami Vivekananda, places discipline and training at the centre of education because knowledge without moral discernment lacks ethical direction. When knowledge is guided by Viveka, the faculty of discriminative reasoning, it becomes ethically transformative,

enabling individuals to distinguish right from wrong beyond situational convenience (Ranganathananda 1987, Vol. 3 pp. 620 - 621). Viveka activates buddhi, the enlightened intellect through which ethical judgement is exercised. This alignment produces dharma not as an abstract moral code but as lived ethical conduct rooted in clarity, restraint, and responsibility. Dharma, therefore, emerges as the practical expression of metaphysical insight translated into daily action, ensuring that personal choice remains aligned with justice (nyāya), fairness, and social harmony.

Bhartṛhari's Nīṭisataka (verse 74) provides a concise ethical ideal that exemplifies this principle. The figure of the dhīra, the morally steadfast individual, represents a person whose conduct is anchored in justice regardless of external reward, social approval, or personal loss. Praise or blame, prosperity or deprivation, and even the imminence of death do not divert the dhīra from the path of nyāya. This ideal captures the essence of ethical governance: integrity that is internally regulated rather than externally enforced.

Thus, the dhīra embodies the ethical core of IEGM, demonstrating how disciplined intellect, guided by viveka, sustains just conduct across personal, institutional, and societal domains (Ranganathananda 1987, 620–621).

Ahimsa and the Centrality of Non-Violence

Ahimsa, or non-violence, forms the second foundational construct across Indic traditions. Within Sanathana Dharma, ahimsa is upheld as a supreme virtue, with numerous texts advising the minimisation of harm to all beings wherever possible. While Sanathana ethics accepts the practical necessity of defensive violence in extreme circumstances, the overall orientation is toward compassion, controlled action, and avoidance of unnecessary harm (Mahabharata – Shanti Parva (Moksha-dharma) Ganguli, 1883–1896 pp. 4930–4931).

Jainism radicalises this orientation into its principal ethical doctrine: ahimsa paramo dharmaḥ—non-violence is the highest dharma. Because all beings possess jīva, violence against any life form creates karmic bondage and obstructs spiritual progress (Jacobi, 1895 p. 248). Jain monks practise rigorous non-harm, avoiding occupations, foods, and activities that risk injury to even microscopic organisms. This sustained ethical discipline illustrates how metaphysical beliefs about the nature of consciousness directly inform moral conduct.

Buddhism also places non-violence at the heart of its ethical system. Rooted in dependent origination, violence is seen as an expression of ignorance that perpetuates suffering for both the actor and recipient. The Dhammapada proclaims that hatred is not overcome by

hatred but by love, framing non-violence as a pragmatic and psychological necessity rather than simply a moral rule (Harvey, 2000, pp. 69, 156).

Sikhism, while accepting the necessity of force in the defence of justice, strongly condemns cruelty, oppression, and exploitation. It elevates moral courage and protection of the innocent as expressions of non-violence appropriately understood. The Sikh Gurus portrayed resistance to injustice as a sacred duty, balancing compassion with firmness (Thind & Khalsa, 2012 p. 124, 511).

Across traditions, ahimsa emerges not as passivity but as an active commitment to minimise harm and promote well-being.

Ethical Livelihood, Labour Dignity, and the Social Order

Indic traditions develop sophisticated models of livelihood ethics grounded in metaphysical insight. Sanathana Dharma articulates svadharma and svabhāva—the idea that each individual possesses inherent dispositions that should guide vocational activity. The Bhagavad Gita presents the performance of one's own duty as superior to imitating another's, advocating for alignment between work and inner nature (Swami Mukundananda, 2022 p. 120). Classical texts also describe early labour protection. The Arthaśāstra provides detailed guidance on worker welfare, safety standards, and fair remuneration (Shama Sastry, 1915 pp. 106 – 108, 207 – 208, 309 – 311).

Jainism approaches livelihood through the principle of right occupation, prohibiting professions that cause violence, deception, or exploitation. This extends beyond personal purity to social responsibility, as livelihoods that harm communities or ecosystems are considered ethically impermissible (Jacobi, 1895 p. 163).

Buddhism incorporates livelihood into its ethical system through samyag ājīva (right livelihood), forbidding trades involving weapons, trafficking, slaughter, or deception. Buddhist ethics thereby anticipate contemporary concerns regarding corporate responsibility and responsible supply chains (Harvey, 2000, pp. 187 - 188).

Sikhism elevates work to a sacred duty through kirat karni or earning an honest living through integrity and effort. Labour is viewed as an expression of dignity, and exploitation of workers is treated as a grave moral failure. Sikh tradition thus merges personal ethics with economic justice (Singh, 2009 p. 16; Thind & Khalsa, 2012 pp. 141, 147, 956).

Across Indic civilisation, livelihood is viewed as a domain of moral responsibility, not merely economic activity.

Integrity, Governance, and Anti-Corruption

Good governance is an integral part of Indic ethics. The Arthaśāstra outlines sophisticated protocols for public administration, including anti-corruption audits, oversight mechanisms, and accountability norms (Shama Sastry, 1915 pp. 131 - 141). Sanathana texts also emphasise that rulers must act for the welfare of all beings, protecting the weak and administering justice (Ganguli, 1883–1896 pp. 4151, 4266 - 4267).

Jain monastic governance demonstrates transparency and restraint, with communal decision-making processes that prevent power concentration. Buddhism's Vinaya contains extensive regulations on financial honesty and communal discipline (Gethin, 1998, pp. 39–45). Sikh tradition condemns bribery and injustice, positioning ethical leadership as a spiritual duty.

Across the Indic world, integrity is not merely a managerial expectation but a sacred obligation embedded in the moral order.

Environmental Stewardship as a Moral Imperative

All Indic traditions position ecological responsibility as an ethical necessity informed by metaphysical insight. The Atharva Veda presents Earth as a nurturing mother deserving reverence and restraint. The Rig Veda sacralises water and plants as life-giving forces to be protected rather than exploited. These hymns form one of the earliest documented ecological ethics in world literature (Narendra Vijayasimha, 2025).

Jainism integrates environmental care into its doctrine of non-violence, extending compassion to animals, plants, and even elemental life. The restraint in consumption practised by Jain communities represents a sustained ecological ethic (Jacobi, 1895 p.26).

Buddhism grounds environmental stewardship in interdependence: harming nature creates conditions for suffering that reverberate through the entire ecosystem. Monastic rules encourage low-impact living, frugality, and mindful resource use (Harvey, 2000, pp. 177 - 185).

Sikh texts describe nature as a manifestation of the Divine; environmental degradation therefore constitutes a spiritual violation. The emphasis on harmony with nature reinforces communal responsibility for ecological balance (Thind & Khalsa, 2012 pp.465).

Taken together, Indic traditions articulate a deeply integrated ecological ethic that precedes modern sustainability discourse.

Layer III — Institutional Outcomes Across Indic Traditions

Layer III examines how the metaphysical and ethical constructs of the Indic civilisation translate into concrete institutional expressions across social, political, economic, and

communal life. Unlike traditions that separate metaphysical inquiry from social structures, Indic thought embeds institutional governance within its cosmological and ethical frameworks. Thus, institutions such as guilds, monarchies, monastic communities, and Sikh collective bodies emerge as structured embodiments of deeper philosophical commitments: interdependence, moral duty, non-violence, justice, and stewardship. This section identifies four major institutional outcomes shared across Sanathana Dharma. These outcomes demonstrate the civilisational continuity underlying the Indic tradition.

Labour Regulation, Vocational Ethics, and Economic Justice

Indic traditions produced robust institutional mechanisms governing labour and economic activity. Within Sanathana society, guilds (*sreṇi*) operated as structured professional bodies responsible for regulating skill standards, wages, working conditions, and dispute resolution. According to the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* and related texts, guilds held judicial authority within their domain, adjudicating conflicts with fairness and expertise (Kalita, 2017, pp. 174–176). These guilds thus served as early regulatory organisations comparable to modern chambers of commerce and labour unions.

Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* provides one of the earliest known treatises on labour administration. It prescribes fair wages, limitations on coercive labour, safety standards, and welfare provisions for workers (Shama Sastry, 1915 pp. 308 - 309). The text also outlines sanctions for employers who exploit labourers, demonstrating a sophisticated institutional concern for economic justice.

Jain ethical principles extended naturally into economic institutions. The prohibition against harmful occupations required communities to organise economic structures around livelihoods that avoided violence and exploitation (Jacobi, 1895 p. 163). As a result, Jain trading networks historically developed reputations for ethical business practices, honesty, and restraint.

Buddhist monastic institutions, although not primarily economic entities, institutionalised labour ethics through the principle of right livelihood, prohibiting participation in trades involving harm, deceit, or exploitation. This guidance shaped broader lay behaviour and influenced community-level economic norms (Harvey, 2000 p. 187 - 189).

Sikh tradition similarly emphasised economic fairness. The principles of *kirat karni* (honest labour) and *vand chhakna* (sharing one's earnings) informed the organisation of Sikh communities into cooperative, mutually supportive economic units. The *Ardas* stipulate that as a requirement for every Sikh (Singh, 2009 p.86)

Collectively, these institutional expressions illustrate how Indic ethical constructs translated into systems promoting fairness, dignity, and responsible economic life.

Human Rights and Social Equality as Institutional Norms

Although the contemporary vocabulary of ‘human rights’ did not exist in ancient Indic society, the underlying values of dignity, respect, and fairness were embedded in institutional structures. Sanathana texts articulate a vision of governance in which rulers bear responsibility for ensuring the protection and welfare of all subjects. The Mahābhārata states that a ruler must uphold justice for all beings and ensure that none suffer injustice (Ganguli, 1883–1896 pp.4266 - 4268). This principle was institutionalised through the dharmic expectations placed upon kings, councils, and judicial bodies, which were mandated to protect the vulnerable and punish exploitation. (Ganguli, 1883–1896 pp. 4150 – 4155). The metaphysical idea that all beings share the same inner essence (Atman) becomes, therefore, a basis for recognising equal moral status in social structures.

Jain communities institutionalised equality by rejecting birth-based hierarchy within monastic life. Narratives such as the ascent of Harikesha in the Uttarādhyayana Sūtra illustrate that spiritual authority rested on ethical conduct and discipline rather than lineage (Jacobi, 1895 pp. 50 – 55). This dynamic created monastic institutions grounded not in inherited privilege but in demonstrable virtue and capability.

Buddhist monastic institutions likewise embodied egalitarianism. The Vinaya frequently emphasises impartial treatment of monastics regardless of social origin, reinforcing the belief that moral worth does not depend on caste or heritage. The Sangha thus served as a prototypical institution of ethical equality (Gethin, 1998, pp. 39–45).

Sikh tradition institutionalised equality in its most radical form. The Langar—a communal kitchen open to all irrespective of caste, gender, or status—became an enduring socio-religious institution reflecting the metaphysical principle of divine unity (Ik Onkar). This institutional innovation translated theological belief into everyday social practice, making equality materially accessible (Singh, 2009, p. 19).

Across Indic traditions, therefore, institutions are designed to reflect metaphysical commitments to unity, dignity, and equality.

Ecological Governance and Resource Stewardship

Indic civilisational institutions demonstrate a long-standing commitment to environmental care, grounded in the metaphysical view that the natural world is alive, interconnected, and sacred. Sanathana texts depict Earth as a nurturing mother whose welfare is

inseparable from that of humanity (Narendra Vijayasimha, 2025). This reverence for nature informed ancient practices of agricultural regulation, forest preservation, and water stewardship. State authorities were required to protect forests, regulate hunting, and ensure that water sources remained clean and accessible (Narendra Vijayasimha, 2025).

Jain institutions extended ecological governance through strict dietary and occupational restrictions that minimised harm to living beings. Community norms encouraged restrained consumption, careful use of water, and non-destructive agriculture. These practices represent one of the earliest sustained expressions of environmental ethics embedded within institutional life (Jacobi, 1895 p. 45 – 52, 178–179).

Buddhist monastic rules promoted low-resource living, frugality, and minimisation of waste. These practices institutionalised sustainable lifestyles and influenced surrounding communities through example and teaching (Harvey, 2000 p.215).

Sikh scripture encourages ecological governance and resource stewardship by portraying nature as sacred and emphasising humanity's duty to live in harmony with all creation. Hymns in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib depict rivers, forests, animals and seasons with reverence, urging respect, conservation and protection rather than exploitation (Kaur, 2020)

Anti-Corruption and Ethical Governance Structures

Sanathana traditions developed sophisticated institutional mechanisms to prevent corruption and uphold ethical governance. The Arthaśāstra contains detailed descriptions of administrative protocols, audit procedures, and oversight structures designed to ensure transparency and prevent misuse of power (Shama Sastry, 1915 pp. 67 - 72, 124–129, 348 - 349). Kaṭilya identifies numerous ways in which officials might engage in corrupt behaviour and prescribes both preventive measures and punitive sanctions. This administrative sophistication reflects a recognition that corruption disrupts social order and undermines dharma.

Aśoka edicts similarly institutionalise moral governance by mandating humane treatment of subjects, impartial justice, and regular oversight by appointed officers. These inscriptions demonstrate an early attempt to embed ethical values within the administrative machinery of the state (Nikam & McKeon, 1959 Foreword p. xiii–xvi).

Jain monastic governance relied on communal decision-making and collective discipline, reducing opportunities for individual corruption. The emphasis on truthfulness and non-possession further limited institutional vulnerabilities (Jacobi, 1895 p.83)

Buddhist governance systems use Vinaya rules, communal oversight, and confession procedures to prevent misconduct. By countering greed and deception, these structures promote integrity, transparency, and anti-corruption within the monastic community (Harvey, 2000 pp. 93 – 97, 121 – 122, 144 - 145)

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

The Indic Ethics-to-Governance Model (IEGM) demonstrates that Indic civilisational thought provides a deeply integrated moral architecture in which metaphysical principles, ethical norms, and institutional expressions form a continuous philosophical system. By drawing solely upon primary texts, the model outlines how ideas such as *ṛta*, interdependence, universal sentience, and divine immanence generate ethical constructs—dharma, ahimsa, just livelihood, stewardship, and integrity—that in turn inform institutional structures governing labour, justice, ecology, and public welfare. These ethical–institutional linkages closely parallel the four thematic domains of the United Nations Global Compact: human rights, labour, environmental responsibility, and anti-corruption. Although IEGM is presented here as a theoretical model without reference to secondary literature or empirical analysis, its implications for contemporary governance are significant. It illustrates that sustainability and responsible business conduct can be grounded not only in regulatory frameworks but also in culturally rooted ethical worldviews that motivate organisational behaviour through shared meaning. By demonstrating how Indic traditions embed moral order within the fabric of existence, the model offers global businesses a philosophical foundation for aligning their strategies with universal principles of dignity, fairness, stewardship, and integrity

Conflict of Interest

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