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Indian Philosophical Thought as a Framework for Sustainable Governance: A Qualitative Exploration of Ahimsa, Aparigraha, Dharma and Ecological Interconnectedness

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ABSTRACT: Increasingly severe problems such as climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the consumption of unsolicited resources have revealed the deficiencies in governance models that essentially depend on regulation and market-based tools. Therefore, it is necessary to develop value-based governance systems which can be an effective mean of promoting environmental sustainability at a long-term basis. The study examines how Indian Philosophical Thought may serve as the basis for Sustainable Governance by looking into the principles of Ahimsa, Aparigraha, the concept of Dharma, and Ecological Interconnectedness in an interpretivist paradigm research methodology and qualitative exploratory design approach. The research is carried out with a target sample of informants through semi-structured interviews of scholars, policymakers, and environmental practitioners as well as experts in Indian philosophy. Thematic analysis was employed in processing and analyzing collected data to come up with themes that are most relevant for explaining how the principles of Indian philosophy find their relevance in modern governance and sustainability practices. The results are expected to show that the values found in Indian philosophical traditions which emphasize environmental consciousness, the ethical approach to resource utilization, and the promotion of the interests of the community at the expense of individualistic pursuits encourage sustainability as a long-term goal. Moreover, this paper outlines a governance framework that is a complement of the traditional public policy and the environmental governance model through the integration of indigenous ecological ethics into the discourse of sustainability. This research is relevant for the fields of governance, sustainability and public policy as it presents a local, culturally rooted framework that deals with environmental issues and at the same time gives practitioners, policymakers, and different institutions guidelines and a tool with which they can operate more efficiently by taking the indigenous perspectives into account.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

During the 21st century we have witnessed a dramatic surge in economic growth, technology, and a great level of global integration. These changes have greatly improved most people's living standards and economic well-being. But besides this, they have also led to environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change, along with resource depletion (Ameta 2026). Governance systems worldwide continue to face the challenges of balancing economic development with environmental sustainability. Even though a lot of environmental laws, international agreements, and measures for sustainable development have been taken up, the ecological problems still are very serious and, worse still, in some cases are

even getting worse. Increasing incidences of major climate-related disasters, natural resources shortage, pollution, and ecosystem degradation indicate the necessity for new approaches. It seems like the present-day governance systems are not able to deal the issues related to the sustainable living. (Deepak, 2025).

The main disadvantage of existing governance frameworks is their excessive priority given to a single goal: economic growth, industrial development, and market efficiency. In many cases, these policy strategies have brought about development but simultaneously have created problems by means of the overexploitation and the unsustainable use of natural resources (Düvel and Schmidt (2026). Experts have pointed out that development model which has been prevalent has, often, treated nature just as a source of money and profit without thinking that she is a living ecosystem needing to be protected and cared for. This led to environmental imbalances which are serious (Raworth, 2023; Hickel, 2020). Sustained governance is a new idea that scholars and policymakers are discussing these days. Apart from normal governance, it is also a tool to hold up environmental issues, the principle of fairness, economic recovery, and the idea of sharing the earth among the generations. The essence of sustainable governance is to find governance structures that will support the people's happiness while still protecting the environment (Biermann et al., 2022).

However, most environmental protection programs still concentrate on engineering solutions or relevant legislation and often ignore deeper psychological or cultural dimensions of human-nature relations. Therefore several recent studies have emphasized that in order to effectively solve sustainability problems; environmental ethics, collective welfare, and ecosystem awareness must be the core principles of governance. (Gupta et al., 2023; Folke et al., 2021; LealFilho, W., & Alves, M. A. D. (2024).

In response, many scholars are drawing on individuals & aposs values. They are also looking at the old knowledge systems and the philosophical ideas of the cultures other than the West in order to explore more and more the topics related to sustainability (Das et al., 2026). The nature of humans and their interactions with nature are at the heart of such studies which look upon environmental stewardship as a moral obligation (United Nations, 2024; Sahni, 2025). A particular tradition of intellectual works from the non-Western world that can contribute to the sustainability debates is the Indian philosophical thought. India has been influenced a lot by religious, spiritual, and cultural philosophies. It can be regarded today as the repository of real practical wisdom. It is a worldview that emphasizes peace, a moderate lifestyle, the oneness of all, and moral duties which, in view of the current ecological breakdowns and unsustainable lifestyle trends, can be of great significance (Soni, 2026; Sharma & Bansal, 2022).

A lot of central ideas from our Indian philosophical heritage are very helpful in understanding and shaping the issue of Sustainable Governance. Dharma is a basic idea that shows the importance of good deeds, responsibility, and doing one's jobs as individuals and collective groups (Sharma, 2025). Whereas emphasis on rights focuses largely on a person's or group of persons rights, Dharma highlights the duties one has towards the community, the future generations, as well as the environment. When it comes to the system of governance through Dharma, it suggests that the government should be fair, balance its actions, and the overall well-being of the people shall be the focus (Rao, 2021). In the broader meaning, ahimsa is non-violence, yet in these paragraphs it means the prohibition of all types of physical as well as non-physical interruption of the normal life of a living being. Thus, the term is very comprehensive in scope (Chanu and Daisuke, 2026).

Jain scholars considered Ahimsa an eco-friendly teaching that discourages activities that destroy the environment or threaten biodiversity. By promoting kindness and avoiding exploitation, Ahimsa encourages the human community to relate to nature in a sustainable and caring way. (Jain & Singh, 2023) Today, governance is also informed by Ahimsa, and this principle could guide laws that promote environmental cleanliness, protect nature, and use natural resources wisely.

A third major philosophical idea in Indian thought is Aparigraha, which refers to non-attachment and non-possession. It supports a moderate lifestyle and a less greedy way of life. In contrast to today's high-consumption societies, these ancient philosophies teach people to want and consume less, since they view material desires as a burden on life. Aparigraha encourages reflection on what people need, how they obtain it, mindful use of things, and keeping waste to a minimum (Bala et al., 2026). Recently, environmental sustainability studies have found that meeting environmental targets requires consumption patterns that minimize resource use and favor enough rather than more. The philosophical concept of Aparigraha was therefore a strong ethical basis for current discussions on sustainable living, such as the circular economy and responsible consumption (Pratihari and Roy, 2025).

In addition to the principle of interconnectedness, Indian philosophical thought has also contributed the idea of ecological interdependence. Philosophies like Vedanta, Buddhism, and Jainism recognize the interdependence between the different elements of the universe and that one's existence or flourish greatly depends on the natural world around us. This perspective is very different from the human-centered view which influenced a great portion of the 19th and 20th-century human activities. Such thinking has usually put human interest above nature, causing ecological exploitation and environmental degradation. Instead, these philosophical traditions describe natural elements to which human beings are also connected as essential features to be protected (Kumar et al., 2022; NITI Aayog, 2023).

Experts today in environmental and sustainability studies have also highlighted the importance of systemic thinking and the principle of ecological interdependence in dealing with intricate environmental issues through the example of different nature-based solutions (Folke et al., 2021). Overall, this strand of research demonstrates very well how philosophical ideas can have a significant impact on present-day governance which can guide it towards a sustainable future.

The research void is becoming more urgent given the rising interest worldwide in diverse and culturally pluralistic approaches to sustainability. Drawing upon Indian philosophical schools while discussing governance matters would open avenues for finding environmental issues solutions and adding new ingredients to existing theoretical frameworks (Rathod and Trivedi, 2025). This combination of elements could support ethical governance, encourage responsible consumption, promote environmental awareness, and inspire more comprehensive strategies for sustainable development. Bearing in mind these changes, this research will be focused on analyzing how non-violence (Ahimsa), non-possessiveness (Aparigrahi) which is also a form of simple living, Dharma (duty), and ecological connection could be the building block for sustainable governance systems of the future.

This study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, that it look at the opinion of philosophers, sustainability experts, policymakers, and scholars regarding the role of these ethical principles in governance practices of the present day. Through the discovery of common ground between Indian thought traditions and ideas of sustainable governance, the work will be able to bring forward the idea of the governance from an ethically informed perspective and provide a foundation for the development of the models of sustainability which are based on cultural realities.

The research questions and hypotheses are aimed at filling the gap by verifying the extent to which wisdom from ancient philosophical texts on Indian cultural heritage can be used to develop environmental governance models in contemporary times where the issues of ecology and environment are very complex. This paper adopts a qualitative explanatory research design to gather views of philosophers, sustainability practitioners, policymakers, and academics regarding their opinion on the relevance of these principles to the context of the governance today through the conduct of interviews.

To a great extent, the paper hopes that an analysis of these connections will contribute to the field of governance in general, especially when it comes to governance of an ethical kind while, at the same time, it will be providing guidance to how a development plan for a particular community should be formulated so that it is not only ecologically sustainable in a way that does not destroy the planet's ecosystems but also rooted in a specific cultural context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainable Governance

The concept of governance has been redefined recently. Previously, governance was mainly concerned with aspects such as administrative activities, policymaking, and economic growth. However, the increasing environmental degradation and demand for social justice have expanded the scope of governance tasks to include also sustainability aspects (Pushkar and Srivastava, 2026). Modern governance models anticipate that the role of development should not only serve the economy but also protect the environment, advocate social equity, and provide a fair distribution of resources between generations (Biermann, 2022). This wider interpretation of governance has led to the idea of sustainable governance, the integration of social, economic and physical aspects decision-making. According to the definition by Meadowcroft (2007), sustainable governance describes capacity of laws, regulations, and the main players of the decision-making process to take into account human development but also the preservation of ecological balance.

Ravikanth (2021), State that one of the key aspects of sustainable governance is the ability of the organization to manage a sustainability problem through the means of collaboration, public participation, and adaptable governance rules. On the other

hand, in their paper, Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2019) underline the importance of changing government-dominated and hierarchical forms of control to a layered and comprehensive governance system which should include governments, private companies, nonprofit civil society organizations, and communities at the local level.

The launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has further reinforced sustainable governance. The SDGs encourage the simultaneous use of integrated methods to address problems such as poverty, inequality, and natural resource loss, and to promote economic progress (United Nations, 2023). In fact, the role of governance is becoming increasingly prominent in achieving sustainability goals. Governance can assist in the enactment of environmental standards, the facilitation of environmentally friendly production and consumption of goods and services, and the encouragement of a sustainable use of natural resources (Gupta et al., 2023). In spite of the progress, there is still much to be done. Most systems of governance continue to place emphasis on increasing wealth rather than protecting nature. The processes of industry, city-building, and the integration of global economies have rapidly extracted raw materials, and the natural environment has been harmed in ways that are hardly compatible with a long-term vision of sustainability (Leal Filho et al., 2024). Experts in the field have pointed out that such failures in governance often stem from politicians who think only of the present, a lack of coordination among departments, insufficient regulatory mechanisms, and a dearth of public involvement (Biermann et al., 2022; Sachs et al., 2022).

A number of recent publications emphasize the vital position of ethical governance in achieving sustainability. A governance system with high ethical standards implies fair public decisions in the name of openness, accountability, justice, and taking responsibility (Jabbour et al. 2023). These are all moral values that can help solve environmental issues. Therefore, it is increasingly common for researchers to recommend adopting ethical standards as part of governance systems to promote sustainable development (Singh, 2021).

The third major area in the discussion of sustainable governance, and one that has gained increasing attention, is the growing recognition of indigenous and other traditional knowledge systems. Rather than typical scientific or technological solutions, local cultures and ways of handling problems may be just as effective, if not more so, in addressing sustainability challenges (Whyte, 2020). In a more practical sense, the ways in which indigenous societies manage their relationships with the natural environment and participate in it can serve as examples of sustainable development that other governance styles might look to for guidance. Indian philosophical traditions, in particular, provide enlightening insights into the ethics of governance and ecological sustainability (Hakam et al., 2026).

Table 1: Major Perspectives on Sustainable Governance

Perspective	Core Focus	Key Contributors	Relevance to Sustainability
Institutional Governance	Regulatory systems and institutions	North (2005), Ostrom (2010)	Policy implementation and resource management
Environmental Governance	Environmental protection and regulation	Lemos & Agrawal (2006)	Conservation and ecological management
Participatory Governance	Stakeholder engagement	Bäckstrand & Lövbrand (2019)	Inclusive decision-making
Adaptive Governance	Flexibility and resilience	Folke et al. (2021)	Responding to environmental uncertainty
Ethical Governance	Moral responsibility and accountability	Jabbour et al. (2023)	Sustainable and responsible policymaking
Indigenous Governance	Traditional ecological knowledge	Whyte (2020)	Long-term ecological stewardship

2.2 Sustainability Challenges in Contemporary Society

Today's societies are facing several interconnected sustainability problems that have the potential of damaging the environment in various dimensions, economic conditions and human well-being as well (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022; United Nations Environment Programme, 2021)). Climate change and resource depletion are among the major challenges. For instance, the primary topic at the level of international discourse has been the issue of climate change during last the few decades. One of the reasons for the overall rise in the temperatures and changes in the weather-related patterns is the industrial development, burning fossil fuels and destruction of forests that are all the contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2023).

The effects of climate changes together with an environmental crisis caused by the exhausting of nature's resources, another major problem of sustainability, create a formidable situation. With the expansion of the industry and the continuation of consumer behaviour, mankind's use of non-renewable resources such as oil, minerals, and water has grown significantly and has now reached new peaks. A graph that shows a threefold increase over five decades according to the figure of Global material consumption by United Nations Environment Program is a good indication of the massive burden that is now being put on these natural systems (UNEP, 2024).

Possibly one of the factors contributing least to solving problems of sustainability is the culture of possession. This materialistic way of life that characterizes much of the world today is not the only reason why most modern economies depend on consumer spending; it is also very harmful to the environment. Because they are continuously supplied with new items from the market, it seems people will not stop getting and possessing new things. Through advertising, social media platforms and competition within markets, this culture of consumption can be deeply reinforced and spread (Alexander & Rutherford, 2020). The study found that heavy use of the earth's natural goods leads to waste and emissions, as well as a decline of the resources in question, with both situations getting worse from time to time. (Hickel, 2020). As you can see, the unsustainable consumption's effect on the environment is getting very evident.

There is more species extinction, more deforestation, more soil degradation, more marine waste, and more ecosystem disruption. A body of international scientists and policymakers, called IPBESC, has stated that human activities are driving much of the loss of biodiversity, which threatens the ecosystem services essential to the survival and health of the human species. As these trends unfold, it is clear from what was said earlier that the sustainability aspects are the ones being challenged here (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2024; United Nations Environment Programme, 2024; World Bank; 2025).

Economic and social inequalities are major obstacles to making the transition to sustainable development. Environmental deterioration has the greatest impact on communities that are economically weaker and have limited resources and limited ability to adapt to such changes. For instance, climate-related disasters, hunger, and lack of clean water affect vulnerable and marginalized people more severely (United Nations, 2023). For this reason, the meaning of sustainability has broadened to include both environmental and justice issues.

According to Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (2022), many of the problems of current sustainability stem from the value systems that underpin Western economies. These value systems are based more on money-making, profit, and short-term satisfaction than on maintaining ecological balance or benefiting society as a whole. As a result, increasing focus is being devoted to development models that emphasize restraint, responsibility, and ecological balance. Ancient Indian teachings, which focus on harmony between people and the environment, could also give good guidance for solving these problems Pal (2026).

2.3 Indian Philosophical Thought and Sustainability

Indian philosophical thought is known to scholars as one of the ancient civilizations' great contributions. It can provide deep insights for contemporary sustainability challenges through the lens of the interdependence of humans, society, and nature that is inherent in Indian philosophy (Sharma & Bansal, 2022).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024) unlike modern approaches to environmental problems which are largely scientific or economic in nature, Indian thought regards the environment as primarily ethical in nature,

emphasizing the need for responsible, virtuous, harmonious, and ethical behaviour in one's relationship with nature. Such ideas and principles are ideal for a discussion on sustainability, governance, and similar topics.

To start with, Dharma is probably one of the central concepts in Indian philosophy. The term is very broad: duty, righteousness, and moral responsibility, to mention a few. According to this principle, the well-being of society and the maintenance of moral order require individuals and institutions alike to behave responsibly towards society, future generations, and Nature (Rao, 2021). Governance in the context of Dharma, for example, should be the result of policies that look at long-term welfare at face value and give priority to such considerations instead of being carried into short-term economic interests. There has been a growing awareness among researchers that Dharma can help cultivate responsible leadership, environmental stewardship, and sustainable decision-making (Mishra & Sharma, 2023).

Ahimsa as a principle plays an essential role in all three religious traditions: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. Although it is often taken to signify non-violence, the true meaning of Ahimsa goes deeper; it involves treating other living beings with respect insofar as one does so from the human side (NITI Aayog, 2024). Scholars have argued that at the heart of Ahimsa lies a commitment to the environment, which, in their words, leads us to condemn practices that result in ecological destruction, resource exploitation, and environmental injustice (Jain & Singh, 2023). Ahimsa helps individuals and societies develop feelings of compassion and empathy; thus, a person becomes more sensitive towards Nature, which fits very well with present-day issues of environmental sustainability.

Aparigraha encourages us to live a simple lifestyle free of excess without becoming a burden on the environment through our activities like overconsumption and accumulation, which cause environmental degradation as well as resource depletion (Verma & Tripathi, 2024). Recently many sustainability studies are suggesting that the pursuit of sufficiency through lifestyle changes and restriction of consumption are essential development features. The findings have clearly shown similarities between these research conclusions and the practice of Aparigraha (Alexander & Rutenberg, 2020).

Lokasangraha meaning the promotion of society's well-being together with its protection, is an important concept that was extracted from the Bhagavad Gita's wisdom. It reminds people in leadership and society at large about the importance of promoting the good of the society and environment as the highest form of public service Sachs et al. (2024). Governance-wise, Lokasangraha supports opening up access to policies and securing social rights to the environment by taking collective responsibility. (Srinivasan, 2022) A view like this would surely align one with modern discussions on sustainable development and public value.

Finally, among the many Indian philosophical schools like Hinduism, Hinduism in the form of Vedanta, and Buddhism, a very important lesson is that human beings and nature or environment are not separate entities but part and parcel of one big environmental whole. The awareness of our deep dependence on nature, environment, and the whole ecological system that supports life is a source of wisdom leading to environmental protection and harmony. (Kumar & Mishra, 2022) Actually, quite a few researchers these days also recommend systems thinking, seeing all of humankind, the environment being the Earth and their interconnections (ecological and otherwise) to solve environmental crises at a global level (Folke et al., 2021).

Collectively, through the different philosophical perspectives, we can have sustainability at the right ethical level not just the compliance of legal rules or technological advancement. It is also about consumption that leads to a change in the mindset, keeping nature as our own for preservation through mindful actions and cooperation, sharing, etc. It seems that integrating Indian philosophical concepts into current governance mechanisms is still a quite un- and underexplored field (Sachs et al., 2023).

2.4 Ecological Interconnectedness in Indian Philosophy

One of the major gifts that Indian philosophical thought has given to our sustainability conversations is its insistence on ecological unity. Unlike contemporary human-centered worldviews that view mankind as separate from and superior to nature, Indian tradition usually sees humans as integral and inseparable beings within the ecological order and the cosmic system. This unified view of the world is clearly reflected in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, which, in different ways, all show the close-knit relationship among various creatures and even the ethical obligation of man for the sake of nature (Kumar & Mishra, 2022).

The Upanishads may contain some of the earliest references to ecological unity. These writings, to name a few, say that what separates all things is their different outer covering, which conceals the identical universal essence of which all are made. It is this universal essence which is usually termed Brahman. Viewed through such a lens, human beings appear very small, making it easier to understand the consequences of ecological imbalances triggered by human activities. Scholars working on environmental issues have highlighted how one could develop a deep awareness of nature through this philosophical view. This kind of awareness goes a step beyond what we commonly understand as environmental management by a focus on how a thing is to be used United Nations (2021).

Vedanta's doctrine of Advaita further enriches the ecological vision. The doctrine of Advaita is based on the concept of non-duality and declares that differences between the self and nature are ultimately false. Harm that is done to nature can be said to have harmed yourself as well because everything that has come into existence in the form of living creatures or objects still shares one single source, which is called the Brahman, and the ultimate reality (Vandy et al., 2026)

Jainism's view on biodiversity is its doctrine of *Parasparopagraho Jivanam*, literally 'life supports life'. This idea implies our moral obligation to all living beings of the world. Therefore, this approach not only gives weight to human activities but also promotes biodiversity protection and maintains ecological harmony Ghosh, 2026).

Governments are recognizing the importance of ecological balance as they implement their environmental protection programs. A shift from the narrow, siloed approach to sustainable development to a more integrative, holistic one is now evident. Environmental issues are being studied not only from the perspective of the natural and physical sciences but also from socio-technical and political perspectives. These studies emphasize that these systems are interrelated at many levels and should therefore be addressed jointly to achieve truly holistic development (Folke et al., 2021).

Ironically and yet very interesting is the fact that today's different methods have started to resemble Indian spiritual and philosophical concepts that these systems have always been upholding. I doubt that it would even be possible to come across a concept of these systems of Indian philosophy and spirituality which did not, in its very way, show the idea of interconnectedness and wholeness that these systems have always stood for (Aneja et al. (2026).

Bindlish (2026), state that ecological or environmental interconnectedness awareness has become much more significant in recent centuries. This is because the rise of a new age, the Anthropocene, which is an age characterized by profound, possibly irreversible human-driven changes on the planet, has brought about a need for environmental protection and understanding. Some of the most noticeable examples related to climatic disruptions, loss of biodiversity and other damages that are caused by neglect of ecological interdependence of man and environment are direct result of this man-centered paradigm where nature is only a means to satisfy human desires. Indian thought, however, provides fundamentally different standpoints that may help raise environmental consciousness, elevate ethical considerations and encourage long-range sustainable development. By emphasizing interdependence as the fundamental idea of all relationships these traditions point out that it is through this principle that we can build governance systems that are not only sustainable but also preserve the ecological balance of our planet earth (Naskar; 2026).

2.5 Indian Knowledge Systems and Governance

Indian knowledge systems encompass the shared wisdom found in the moral, philosophical, political and community-oriented traditions that have evolved over many centuries (Rao, 2021). They served as moral guidelines in domains such as governance, community organization, resource management, and the operation of social institutions. Modern governance structures focus on economic and administrative efficiency, while traditional Indian governance models differ from these since the former disregard the values such as ethics, social responsibility and the collective interest whereas the latter place them at the forefront Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (2024)

Indian knowledge systems were traditionally important in governance and their use in literature for influencing governance. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, one of the most significant contributions, is a classic work on governance that discusses how a leader should guide society while ensuring a smooth, stable social order through wise resource management. Kautilya emphasized the idea of a benevolent ruler who is the protector of society and a good friend of the environment (Kohlenberg, 1957).

He was also a great believer in sustainable resource management. He advocated that the king should not only take an economic perspective in managing a country, but also keep in mind the well-being of citizens and a happy environment. Many of the principles found in Kautilya's treatises remain applicable today (Boesche, 2003).

Dharma shastras constitute another major repository of principles on good governance, alongside political science texts, law, and administrative works. Their teachings focus primarily on moral values, duties, and rights as fundamental aspects of governance (Agarwal & Narain, 2019). It was believed that a leader was not just an agent for enforcing people's legal rights and delivering the king's justice, but, above all, a moral guide leading people and a steward of nature, to whom society is responsible for fulfilling its own moral obligation through governance.

These views are quite similar to the modern ideas of ethical governance and corporate social responsibility (Rao, 2021). Moreover, the Bhagavad Gita offers a glimpse of leadership and governance within the realm of spiritual philosophy. The idea of Niskarma Karma (selfless action) in this scripture advises rulers and other people in high positions to work and act so that they do not seek personal or material benefits. For many years, scholars have drawn on these ideas in their research and writing on governance, leadership, and decision-making in the private and public sectors alike (Rawlinson, 1960). These teachings can be useful in today's society, where leaders must make ethical decisions and take into account the long-term interests of communities, especially in areas where environmental and social issues are involved and where diverse interests may conflict.

In fact, the local governance systems, village institutions, and community decision-making mechanisms of old times are tangible expressions of traditional Indian thought. The villagers shared responsibilities for decision-making, conserving natural resources, and protecting the ecosystem through traditional practices. For instance, it is a historical evidence that traditional water harvesting systems, sacred groves or protected forest patches, and community forests managed collectively, reflected that governance at the grassroots level has never lost sight of its main goal- the balance between ecological and social welfare (Boesche, 1964). Such cases, therefore, lead one to think that, in fact, the issues of sustainability have, rather, been very integral to the concept of Indian systems of governance over the years (Gupta et al., 2023).

There have been recent calls for greater understanding and recognition of the value of India's traditional knowledge systems in addressing contemporary problems of environmental destruction and unsustainable development, especially at the level where governments make and implement policies. It has been claimed by these scholars that the current systems of governance lack sufficient ethical foundations and are overly bureaucratic in nature, apart from being short-sighted in their planning (Bhattacharya, 2020).

Indian philosophical and governing traditions provide alternatives in this regard that emphasize three important concepts: moral responsibility, ecological harmony, and the common good. These alternative outlooks can be highly beneficial in highlighting the weaknesses in conventional systems of governance and helping improve them. Nevertheless, one of the difficulties is that, despite the presence of academic communities interested in the subject, the practical implementation of Indian knowledge systems in the contemporary world of governance still has to be worked out to the extent that it could change policymakers' approaches (NITI Aayog, 2021).

Often, research on Indian knowledge systems focuses on historical perspectives without offering practical suggestions for applying them in contemporary contexts for good governance. Thus, there is a need for research that can empirically explore how the traditional wisdom of Indian culture can enrich and develop new forms of sustainable governance and the policies that support them.

2.6 Research Gap

The present study is clearly warranted by the several major gaps in the literature revealed above. First, sustainable governance, while now a very active academic domain, has for the most part been shaped by Western institutional, economic, and environmental theories as the core of its frameworks. These perspectives have indeed contributed significantly to sustainability research, but they often pay little attention to the ethical, cultural, and philosophical aspects of governance. Besides that, much of the growing literature about the relevance of indigenous and local knowledge systems to sustainability still lacks an integrated focus. As such, the issue of Indian philosophical thought and sustainable governance has hardly been

researched in depth. Studies so far have mainly examined concepts such as Dharma, Ahimsa, and Aparigraha separately rather than connecting their collective meaning to governance and public policy (Sharma and Bansal, 2022).

The third major gap mentioned that Indian philosophy and sustainability literature are predominantly theoretical or prescriptive, and very few provide empirical evidence for their conclusions. It is often scholars that point out that Indian spiritual ideas can support nature conservation and sustainable development goals in general, but they hardly give any empirical support. Also, challenges like climate change, resource depletion, consumerism, and ecosystem destruction necessitate governance frameworks that blend operational policies with an element of moral responsibility. Currently, research neglects how Indian philosophical concepts can be used to design governance strategies for these problems.

In other words, the issue of ecological interconnection as a fundamental aspect of governance still lacks sufficient attention. Although Indian philosophical traditions have long recognized interconnectedness as essential, the scope of environmental protection through such concepts as stewardship, designing policies, and sustainable governance outcomes remains to be explored.

Table 2: Research Gaps Identified from Existing Literature

Area	Existing Knowledge	Identified Gap
Sustainable Governance	Strong institutional and environmental focus	Limited ethical-philosophical integration
Indian Philosophy	Conceptual discussions of Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha	Lack of governance-oriented application
Sustainability Research	Predominantly Western theoretical foundations	Limited inclusion of Indian knowledge systems
Empirical Evidence	Mainly conceptual and normative studies	Shortage of qualitative empirical research
Ecological Interconnectedness	Discussed philosophically	Limited governance and policy implications explored

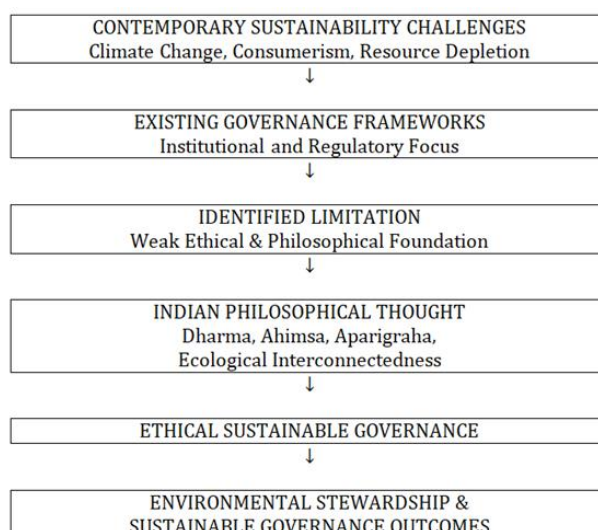


Figure 1 Conceptual Positioning of the Research Gap

Bearing this in mind, the research presented here attempts to uncover the ways in which Indian philosophical tenets especially Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and the notion of ecological interconnectedness-- might help in the shaping of sustainable governance frameworks. A qualitative investigation using experts in philosophy, sustainability, and public policy will allow for drawing practical observations that close the gap between the philosophical wisdom of the past and the governance issues of the present time.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study's conceptual framework is based on three theoretical perspectives: Ethical Governance Theory, Sustainability Theory, and Ecological Ethics. Collectively, these theoretical paradigms help us understand how ethical values and philosophical doctrines can guide towards sustainable governance outcomes. Ethical Governance Theory points out that governance systems shouldn't be merely limited to administrative efficiency and regulatory compliance. Rather, the systems should also include moral responsibility, accountability, transparency, and long-term societal welfare. Sustainability challenges today often point to governance failures which are the result of lack of weak ethical ground rather than a complete absence of policy or regulation (Gupta et al., 2023).

Sustainability Theory reinforces this by stating that all three aspects, that is, economic growth, environmental protection, and social welfare have to be achieved at the same time to secure development over the long term. Therefore, sustainable governance necessitates that the institutions together with decision-makers should not only be able to make fair decisions but also to preserve ecological integrity and intergenerational equity (Biermann et al., 2022). The recent literature on sustainability also brings forward that the governance models, if to be effective, should be rooted in a specific culture of the place and should be based on certain values, which may help unearth environmental problems at the source by understanding them as moral issues rather than only reacting to the effects (Leal Filho et al., 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Ecological Ethics forms the third component of the theoretical foundation of this work. According to this view, humans have moral responsibility towards the environment and environmental safeguarding has to be seen as an ethical obligation instead of a mere economic or regulatory one. The idea of ecological ethics is to question development models that are solely human-centered and encourage a respectful attitude towards all forms of life as well as ecological systems in general (Folke et al., 2021). At the same time, these ideas reflect well on the Indian philosophical traditions that highlight human-nature harmony, moral responsibility, and interdependence as the basic concepts of all life. The recent articles that dealt with sustainability on the one hand and Indian philosophical thought on the other hand, pointed out how the notions of Dharma, Ahimsa, and Aparigraha were especially useful in encouraging environment-friendly activities as well as sustainable development methods.

4.2 Conceptual Relationship

The conceptual framework proposed here situates the Indian philosophical principles as the core drivers of ethical sustainable governance. It contends that the current sustainability issues like climate change, resource depletion, biodiversity loss, and unsustainable modes of production and consumption can only be solved with the help of both institutional and regulatory mechanisms. Governance systems therefore need ethical and philosophical bases to shape policy formulation, leadership styles, and societal attitudes.

Dharma or ethical duty refers here as the first pillar of the concept. It motivates individuals, organizations, and policy makers not to consider their own needs as the only consideration, but rather to think about community well-being, fairness, and the sustainability of resources. Through its emphasis on these moral values, dharma serves as the key element supporting ethically governed societies and responsible decision-making (Rao, 2021; World Economic Forum (2025).

As the philosophy of non-violence, Ahimsa, it broadens the ethical dimension to include not only beings in general but also ecological systems. In governance, Ahimsa means promoting environmental protection and biodiversity conservation and using non-exploitative methods of resource management. Ahimsa nowadays is commonly regarded as a concept of environmental stewardship and ecological responsibility (Hakam et al. (2026).

Aparigraha adds yet another significant facet by advocating moderation. The major causes of modern environmental and sustainability problems are consumerism and resource exploitation. Aparigraha addresses these by offering lifestyle choices based on the concept of sufficiency and by discouraging the accumulation beyond the essential needs of a material nature. Hence, it becomes a moral principle of sustainable consumption and resource conservation (Bindlish, 2026).

The paper's principle of ecological connectedness strengthens the framework by highlighting that humans, societies, and nature are interdependent in one way or another. The Indian philosophical traditions, e.g., Vedanta, Buddhism, and Jainism, all state that, ultimately, environmental degradation harms the physical and mental well-being of human beings because the

whole creation is part of an interconnected web. This outlook inspires governance to adopt an integrated, holistic approach to tackle multifaceted sustainability challenges through systems thinking and the design of integrated policies (Kumar & Mishra, 2022).

Together, these principles form an integral foundation of moral governance for sustainability. Ethical governance, in turn, impacts stewardship of the environment by promoting responsible policy enforcement, sustainable use and management of natural resources, and environmental safeguarding. Stewardship of the environment will then further support sustainable management through a variety of outcomes, including ecological balance, sustainable resource consumption, conservation, and long-term well-being of society. This is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows how ethical, sustainable governance translates into practical stewardship of the environment and sustainable management outcomes.

4.3 Proposed Framework

Having reviewed relevant research and literature on the topic, a conceptual framework has been proposed that integrates Indian philosophical thought as a moral grounding for sustainable governance. The framework suggests that Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and ecological interconnectedness together influence ethical governance practices. Through responsible leadership, sustainable policymaking, and ecological stewardship, ethical governance fosters environmental stewardship. Finally, environmental stewardship helps achieve sustainable governance outcomes, including resource conservation, environmental protection, social welfare, and long-term sustainability.

The theoretical model's hypothesis is that, to achieve institutional transformation, ethical transformation must precede it. In other words, the mere existence of environmental laws or policy tools, without being supported by the value systems that underlie human behavior and influence governance practices, cannot bring about sustainable governance. This line of thinking is compatible with the recent emphasis on values-based governance and indigenous knowledge systems to address sustainability issues. The theoretical model also connects traditional wisdom with modern-day policies, thereby supporting initiatives to create culturally anchored, ethically grounded models of sustainability. Such models are already being tested in different locations worldwide.

Accordingly, the research uses this model to examine how professional stakeholders perceive the relevance of concepts from Indian philosophy to sustainable governance and to identify mechanisms that could help develop policies and governance systems at least partly grounded in these philosophical ideas.



Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Source: Developed by the Author based on the Literature Review

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This article uses a qualitative case study approach to examine whether Indian philosophical thought can serve as a model for sustainable governance. The paper selects four key philosophical ideas, Dharma, non-violence (Ahimsa), simple living/non-coveting (Aparigraha), and ecological interdependencies, and then examines to what extent these ideas can tackle sustainability issues of today.

Qualitative research methodology was selected as the most appropriate for the study, as it seeks a subjective human understanding of philosophical teachings, one's personal meaning of the words, and how one's life would be changed by following those teachings, etc. Such research would provide rich insight into the social and ethical problems humans face without necessarily assigning them any value through quantitative means. If you ask an individual what his worldview is based on and how he feels about his situation, you will find that he gives you a narrative, so to speak. That reality is a social construct, and that different people make sense of things by interpreting events in ways most familiar and suitable to them.

5.2 Research Participants and Sampling

Our paper employs purposive sampling to target participants with deep knowledge of Indian philosophical thought, sustainability, environmental governance, public policy governance, moral studies, and indigenous knowledge systems. In fact, the research design relies on these 'rich cases' as information-bearing participants (Mason, 2020).

We estimate that our sample would include 20-30 experts belonging to these four major areas of knowledge:

- Experts and researchers of Indian philosophy.
- The team of professionals in sustainability and environmental management.
- Representatives of public policy and governance.
- Those who study ethics, sustainability, and ecological science either at an academic level or in practical applications.

We are looking for a diverse group of participants who meet the requirement of 10 years of academic or professional experience, along with scholarly writing, policy activity, and/or practical expertise related to sustainable governance.

5.3 Data Collection Method

The data collected will mainly be primary, as it will be gathered through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews should be used because they give participants some flexibility while helping maintain uniformity of responses across all participants. It is a method that allows interviewees to elaborate on the subjects of their experiences and offer their perspectives, while also allowing interviewers to gain insight into emergent themes and issues in the study.

The design of the interview will be based on a review of the relevant literature on sustainable governance, environmental ethics, and Indian philosophical thought. A few questions will be centered on the following themes :

- What is the role of Dharma in present-day governance?
- How is Ahimsa the means to environmental stewardship?
- How does the principle of Aparigraha help sustainable consumption?
- What is the relationship of ecological interconnectedness to sustainability?
- How can the principles from Indian philosophies be made use of in governance and policy-making in the practical sense?
- What is the problem one may face when philosophical ideals are mixed with modern systems of governance?

Each person will be interviewed for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted either in person or via online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. With the participant's permission, the interviews will be recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

5.4 Data Analysis Technique

In this study, Thematic Analysis will serve as the main analytical tool. Thematic Analysis is one of the most widely acknowledged methods for identifying patterns, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data. (Braun & Clarke, 2022) That makes this method well-suited, as the paper aims to investigate themes related to the impact of Indian philosophical tenets on sustainable governance.

We have decided to go through the six stages that were suggested by Braun and Clarke, as a model of how to conduct the thematic analysis:

Stage 1: Familiarization with Data

Recordings of the interviews will be carefully transcribed without any changes. The researcher, by thoroughly rereading the transcripts, will grasp the participants' full responses and even detect early patterns.

Stage 2: Initial Coding

The process will involve identifying and labeling the most significant statements and relevant passages. The labeling will focus on concepts related to the main topics and other key issues.

Stage 3: Theme Development

Broad themes will emerge by consolidating related sets of codes. Some of the possible main themes might be Ethical Leadership, Responsible Consumerism, and Environmental Stewardship

Stage 4: Theme Review

Potential themes will be examined, improved, and adjusted to guarantee that they are accurate, relevant, and consistent with one another as per the research goals.

Stage 5: Theme Definition and Naming

Each theme will be clearly defined and named to accurately represent its conceptual meaning and relationship to sustainable governance.

Stage 6: Interpretation and Reporting

Each theme will have a clear description and a suitable label for the best possible reflection of its meaning and its relation to sustainable governance.

5.5 Use of Qualitative Data Analysis Software

To improve analytical rigor and transparency, qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo 14 or ATLAS.ti may be utilized. These software tools facilitate systematic coding, theme development, pattern recognition, and visualization of qualitative findings (Woolf & Silver, 2018). The use of software enhances data management efficiency while maintaining consistency throughout the analytical process.

5.6 Trustworthiness and Research Quality

To ensure the procedures are accurate and trustworthy, the study will use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four components of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For credibility, we will not only select the right participants for our interview but will also have a 'member checking' session to ensure that what we have understood from the participants is actually what they intended to say. To check whether your methods and outcomes can work in different contexts, you will carefully describe the research context.

In terms of dependability, it will be very important that the data collection and analysis stages of the research remain recorded as an 'audit trail'. One way to be 'confirmable' is to keep writing 'reflexive notes' while ensuring that the findings come from participants' views rather than the 'researcher's views'. The research will follow ethical guidelines for conducting an ethical study. They will be given a rundown of the study objectives and the right to opt out freely. Before collecting data, they will sign an acknowledgment form. All identifying details, such as names and addresses, will be removed from the transcripts and

reports to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The consent letter will state and make it perfectly clear that the participant can withdraw at any time without penalty.

This study's research method will provide an accurate framework for identifying a meaningful link between Indian philosophical thought and sustainable governance. The research will use 'purposive selection', 'semi-structured' interview guides with a 'thematic analysis' of the collected responses by identifying and coding key themes and patterns. In doing so, the principles of Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and ecological interconnectedness will be discussed, with ethical governance, environmental stewardship, and sustainable development as the goals. As this study includes 'NVivo-assisted thematic analysis' and uses well-defined criteria for trustworthiness, the quality and strength of the findings are likely to be even stronger.

5.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis of the data is expected to shed light on the extent to which principles underlying Indian philosophy, that is, Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and Ecological Interconnectedness, might be of use in promoting sustainable governance. Based on the thematic analysis procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), we first coded the interview transcripts by hand, then classified the codes into larger categories, and finally organized the interviews around these categories. As a result of the theme development process, our analysis revealed five main themes and one umbrella theme on governance outcomes.

1. Dharma-Based Governance
2. Ahimsa in Environmental Ethics
3. Aparigraha and Sustainable Consumption
4. Ecological Interconnectedness and Systems Thinking
5. Sustainable Governance Outcomes

5.2 Profile of Participants

Table 5.1 Participant Profile

Category	Number
Indian Philosophy Scholars	8
Sustainability Experts	7
Governance and Policy Experts	8
Academicians and Researchers	7
Total	30

The sample brings together various viewpoints from several fields, including philosophy, governance, sustainability, and public policy.

5.3 Coding and Theme Development

Differently put, 142 open codes were first extracted from the interview transcripts. In the next phase of analysis, these codes were consolidated into categories and, subsequently, into broader themes.

Table 5.2 Coding Framework

Initial Codes	Categories	Themes
Duty, responsibility, justice	Ethical Governance	Dharma-Based Governance
Compassion, non-violence, ecological respect	Environmental Ethics	Ahimsa and Sustainability
Moderation, restraint, sufficiency	Responsible Consumption	Aparigraha
Interdependence, systems thinking	Ecological Awareness	Interconnectedness
Collective welfare, long-term sustainability	Governance Outcomes	Sustainable Governance Outcomes

5.4 Theme 1: Dharma as a Foundation for Ethical Governance

Dharma was the most widely debated idea, with a focus on its application to governance. Almost all participants expressed the opinion that governance is not solely an administrative task, but also an ethical one. Many respondents highlighted that the current governance mechanisms are more geared towards achieving rapid economic development and serving political interests, but fall short of securing the long-term welfare and well-being of society as a whole. Many suggested that the concept of Dharma contains a structure that may help in reinstating moral and ethical governance and public welfare.

Quotations

"A public office, according to Dharma, is a trust rather than a prize." (Participant 3)

"Dharma reminds politicians that the people will not only benefit from but also expect them to take into account the needs of future generations when they make decisions." (Participant 8)

"A lot of governance failures are traced back to the fact that ethical responsibility was left out of the decision-making processes." (Participant 15)

Table 5.3 Key Codes for Dharma

Code	Frequency
Ethical Responsibility	24
Accountability	22
Public Welfare	21
Justice	19
Long-Term Vision	18

Dharma provides ethical grounds that can boost quality, accountability, and policy development for sustainable governance.

5.5 Theme 2: Ahimsa and Environmental Stewardship

The second major theme revolved around Ahimsa as an environmental ethics perspective. Participants stated that understanding environmental destruction as violence against nature is an important point. The majority of the interviewees supported the idea of seeing Ahimsa as a form of restraint in our behavior towards nature. Beyond the limitations of human-human interaction, it is also a principle not to harm the world around us, including protecting ecosystems and biodiversity and conserving natural resources.

Quotations

"Environmental destruction is a type of violence that future generations suffer from." (Participant 6)

"In teaching one to respect all living things, Ahimsa promotes nature's protection." (Participant 12)

"Just like the principle of non-violence towards humans, it should be extended to ecological systems also." (Participant 21)

Table 5.4 Key Codes for Ahimsa

Code	Frequency
Environmental Protection	26
Biodiversity Conservation	22
Compassion for Nature	20
Ecological Responsibility	19

The participants repeatedly pointed out that environmental ethics must be incorporated in governance frameworks.

5.6 Theme 3: Aparigraha and Sustainable Consumption

The third theme discussed was Aparigraha and its contribution to the facilitation of sustainable consumption patterns. They pointed out that consumerism and materialism, at their extremes, are among the major culprits behind environmental degradation. Aparigraha, they believed, is a philosophical concept that promotes a life of moderation and simplicity, as well as the proper use of resources.

Quotations

"Modern societies consume far beyond their needs." (Participant 5)

"Aparigraha promotes a culture of adequacy rather than overconsumption." (Participant 17)

"Sustainability is impossible to achieve without restraint, whereas Aparigraha can be considered as a moral cornerstone for restraint." (Participant 24)

Table 5.5 Key Codes for Aparigraha

Code	Frequency
Consumption Restraint	27
Resource Conservation	23
Sustainable Lifestyle	21
Simplicity	18

A few participants indicated that Aparigraha could play a role within environmental regulations concerning sustainable production, responsible consumption, and the development of the circular economy.

5.7 Theme 4: Ecological Interconnectedness and Systems Thinking

The fourth theme dealt with the concept of ecological interconnectedness. Participants, through and through, supported the idea that the environmental, social, and economic systems of existence are not separable entities. Some of the interviewees pointed out that the Indian philosophical tradition had underlined the theme of interconnectedness hundreds, if not thousands, of years earlier than the sustainability ideas of today introduced the notion of systematic ways of viewing.

Quotations

"It was stated by Participant 9 that 'the well-being of humans cannot be separated from that of the environment.'"

Participant 20 explained, "Environmental challenges are interlinked and only whole solutions can address them."

Participant 27, on the other hand, shared that, "Indian philosophy by its very nature supports systems thinking."

Table 5.6 Key Codes for Ecological Interconnectedness

Code	Frequency
Interdependence	28
Ecological Balance	25
Systems Thinking	23
Holistic Governance	20

The findings indicate that ecological interconnectedness provides a conceptual basis for integrated sustainability policies.

5.8 Comparative Importance of Themes

Table 5.7 Relative Importance of Themes

Theme	Frequency of References
Dharma-Based Governance	104
Ahimsa and Sustainability	87
Aparigraha and Consumption	89
Ecological Interconnectedness	96

Theme Distribution

The chart reveals that Dharma was the most often discussed theme, while Ecological Interconnectedness, Aparigraha, and Ahimsa followed.

5.9 Integrated Sustainable Governance Framework

The participants were quite interested in integrating the principles of Indian philosophy with sustainability outcomes through the governance system. They have also considered the role of ethical governance as the central medium for conveying the impact of philosophical principles on sustainability. This way, the philosophical principles that are part of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are transformed into sustainability outcomes through the channel of ethical governance.

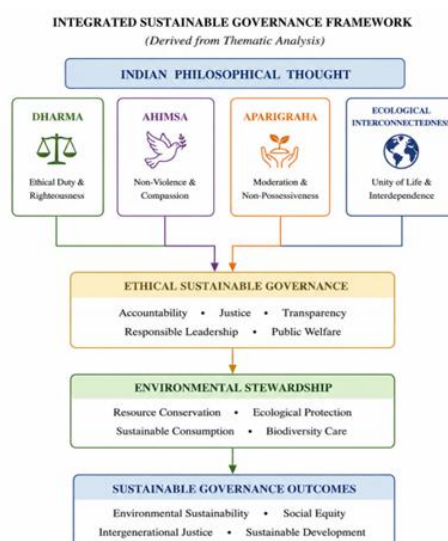


Figure 5.1: Integrated Sustainable Governance Framework
Derived from Thematic Analysis of Expert Interviews

Figure 5.1: Integrated Sustainable Governance Framework

Derived from Thematic Analysis of Expert Interviews

6. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Discussion

This research aims to investigate possibilities for utilizing Indian spiritual thought in sustainable governance through the ideas of Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and Ecological Interconnectedness. According to this study, through the prism of a few such ancient Indian thoughts, one may find an ethical and value-based solution to the pressing ecological issues of our time (Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2025).

As a result of this research, it became evident that the first significant concept is that Dharma serves as the cornerstone of ethical governance. Participants in this study identified Dharma as an agent that promotes accountability, justice, responsibility, and long-term planning in decision-making. These results are in line with studies that also define Dharma as a guiding principle for ethical leadership and public welfare (Rao, 2021). In the modern governance system, where policy formulation is largely determined by short-term economic or political interests, the idea of Dharma offers a perspective that emphasizes the well-being of the common people and future generations. Therefore, according to this discovery, a system of moral governance cannot be brought about solely through institutional arrangements; it demands leaders who value the right things and lead in accordance with morals (UNESCO (2024).

This paper explores Ahimsa to see how environmental stewardship can be facilitated. The respondents regarded environmental destruction as harming not only nature but also future generations. This explanation, apart from revealing Ahimsa's traditional meaning in relation to people, also highlights Ahimsa's responsible role in ecology. These results are backed up by the environmental ethics of biodiversity and ecological justice, as described in the most recent sustainability-related work (Jain & Singh, 2023). When nature is treated kindly and respect is paid to living species, a morally sound framework for biodiversity conservation, environmental protection, and sustainable resource management can naturally emerge (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2021; United Nations, 2025) The fourth result of this research deals with the issue of Aparigraha and sustainable consumption. The participants identified overconsumption and the excessive accumulation of material possessions as the principal contributors to environmental degradation. The participants saw in the principles of Aparigraha the very philosophical basis for responding to these problems of consumerism.

This result also shows how well the research aligns with current sustainability theorists' argument that the long-term survival of the planet, in ecological terms, depends mainly on shifting the focus from consumption-based lifestyles towards sufficiency-based models of growth (e.g., Alexander & Rutherford, 2020). In short, Aparigraha supports sustainable governance by advancing responsible production and consumption policies.

The most important themes to emerge from this investigation is ecological interconnectedness. It goes without saying that the respondents were unanimous in their views that the social, environmental, and economic systems are not only part of nature but also interdependent. In this respect, such a viewpoint is quite close to the systems-thinking approach being championed today, which focuses on designing holistic solutions to the challenges of sustainable development (e.g., Folke et al., 2021).

This research argues that ecological interconnectedness, as an idea, is a useful mediator between old wisdom rooted in nature and current sustainability concepts. To put it another way, our findings confirm that, for instance, Indian philosophy anticipated principles now recognized as fundamental in sustainability science.

The findings of the study demonstrate that Indian spiritual teachings, particularly the concepts underpinning them, such as Dharma, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and Ecological Interconnectedness, present an integrated ethical system that is powerful enough to support sustainable governance strategies. Moreover, such ethical and value-based approaches to the issues have the potential not only to solve them but also to enable prevention. This article shows how integrating ethical values into decision-making, leadership, environmental stewardship, and sustainability policies can make governance more effective and aligned with the requirements of sustainable development.

6.2 Theoretical Implications In this research, we contribute to the literature on sustainable governance by integrating diverse theoretical perspectives. Most sustainable governance frameworks rely heavily on Western theories of governance, environmental management, and public administration (Biermann et al., 2022). We propose Indian philosophical thought as a new theoretical approach to understanding sustainability and governance.

Ethical Governance Theory was enhanced by this study, which showed how principles such as Dharma, Ahimsa, and Aparigraha could guide governance practices. The research also enriched Sustainability Theory by asserting that sustainable development is best pursued with the support of values, ethics, and cultural traditions. In addition, the article strengthened Ecological Ethics by demonstrating the positive effects of interconnectedness, non-violence, and responsible consumption on environmental stewardship and sustainability.

A new and significant theoretical contribution of the article is a combined sustainable governance framework that, on the one hand, integrates philosophical ideas and, on the other, links them to governance processes and sustainability outcomes. The model, thus, offers a starting point for further empirical study of the connection between ethical values and governance performance.

6.3 Practical Implications

The study has practical implications for several key sectors and groups of individuals. If the study is taken seriously, governments may revise governance and management regulations to align with ethical standards and also ensure that ethical values are promoted through environmental and climate change policies and resource-use policies. Public administrators and government bodies need to realize that governance processes will be more effective with a values-based leader. They should make these aspects a part of governance, such as integrity, fairness, and social harmony.

Academic organizations could integrate Indian philosophical concepts into the teaching and learning of issues related to sustainable development, leadership development, and public policy. These kinds of educational practices will likely produce leaders who understand the social and environmental implications of their actions and can therefore be responsible stewards of development.

With regard to business leaders and environmental change agents, the notion of Aparigraha, if embraced, would serve as guides towards developing a culture of ethical consumption and sustainable production. In this way, a company could build on these values and develop its ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) initiatives, leading to sustainability in their operational and organizational practices (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023).

6.4 Limitations of the Study

To begin with, the qualitative characteristic of the research makes the results not able to be applied to other situations besides the research area. The study mainly looks at the viewpoints of the experts rather than how the philosophical values were practically embodied. The study does not measure the actual implementation of the values through action. Another limitation is the subjective understanding of the Indian philosophical ideas. For example, there can be different opinions on Dharma, Ahimsa, and Aparigraha; the meanings of these terms depend on scholars' and practitioners' backgrounds, cultures, and experiences in different situations, so the understanding of these ideas influences the outcome of the work.

A third problem with the research is that it mainly focused on the Indian philosophical tradition. It did not compare these principles with other indigenous or global ethical frameworks. Thus, comparative studies, which are the most promising approach, will likely reveal the most suitable and widely accepted ethical concepts, as well as ways of applying them that lead to a high rate of success in real life.

Finally, there was no direct evaluation of how these principles influence the results of the governance process when we are guided only at the conceptual level. Therefore, empirical research is highly warranted in this case to confirm the framework and its potential improvements.

6.5 Future Research Directions

Researchers might use various methods and instruments to verify relationships assumed within the integrated sustainable governance concept. In addition, there is room to explore differences and similarities between indigenous and Western

philosophical ideas through comparative studies, as such studies may highlight features of a particular concept or tradition that are more widely accepted or better suited to a real-life governance context. There is also the possibility of incorporating Indigenous, Buddhist, Confucian, or even Indigenous Australian ecological views. Researchers could test the application of these ethical values in a particular environment, for example, governance of environmental matters, climate change regulation, environmental sustainability in businesses, public management, developing community-based projects, etc., so that they may understand how these are best used and to what extent they may help solve the problem.

It may also be worthwhile to conduct longitudinal research to show whether the values-based approach to governance will sustain such actions over time. A good understanding of the role of ethical principles in the effectiveness of governance and the state of the environment is the main purpose of these studies. Mixing qualitative and quantitative data-gathering methods will yield a more robust picture of the relationship between Indian philosophical ideas and the governance approach that leads to sustainability. For example, the use of interviews, questionnaires, or observational techniques, together with mathematical or statistical analysis, can yield more credible conclusions.

6.6 Conclusion

The work has investigated, through the four principles of dharma, ahimsa, aparigraha and ecological interconnectedness, the potential of Indian philosophical thinking to guide sustainable governance. The results indicate that these principles together form an ethical backbone that can help in solving the issues of sustainability today. For instance, the promotion of ethical leadership and a greater degree of transparency is facilitated by dharma. On the other hand, a commitment to the protection and restoration of the environment, as well as the recognition of the intrinsic value of all living creatures, are aspects of ahimsa. Moreover, through aparigraha, a decrease in the rate of consumption can be achieved together with the promotion of sustainable use of resources. Lastly, understanding of the interdependencies of nature and human actions as reflected in the ecological interconnectedness principle leads one to think through and act in ways that recognize the whole system or the interconnectedness of the system parts and thus to a systems thinking kind of governance.

The study has shown that sustainability of the governance systems will be more than just having policies and regulations in place. It will also, to a certain extent, involve values and the adoption of such norms as moral responsibility, accountability, etc., as well as cultural values that can influence behavior and decision making.

The idea of combining the time-tested philosophies of the past with the modern challenges of governance in this work has opened up new ways of thinking about ethics governance, sustainability and indigenous knowledge systems. Thus, the framework, while being grounded in a philosophical understanding of the values of Indian philosophy, is yet one that could lead to a deeper engagement of such value systems in the governance of sustainability issues. It has contributed to the discussion of how different cultural and philosophical traditions can be sources of wisdom that are relevant for governance. To summarize, the work has proved that the principles of Indian philosophy are indeed a source of inspiration for those who want or have to find solutions to environmental issues from sustainable development.

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