
DHARMA AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

¹**Manisha Singh**

Ph.D. Scholar, Sarala Birla University, Ranchi, Jharkhand

Assistant English Teacher at ST. Michael's School (10+2), Muri P.O: Chota Muri, Ranchi, Jharkhand.

²**Dr. Priyanka Mishra**

Assistant Professor, PhD Guide, Sarala Birla University, Mahilong Ranchi, Jharkhand

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Abstract

This paper will examine how dharma and moral responsibility interact, highlighting how contextual and relational they are. It explores how dharma forces people to make moral decisions that frequently clash with their own desire and social norms, using inspiration from classical epics. Here there is a discussion on how dharma and moral responsibility form the foundation of a meaningful and harmonious life. Some of the select novels of Mr. Devdutt Pattanaik a contemporary Indian mythologist guide the readers to mend their ways and walk on the righteous path i.e. dharma. The discussion lays emphasis on self-introspection, self-control and inner peace. These principles guide individuals in their journey of self-discovery, help maintain social balance, and foster a sense of purpose. Together, they serve as a moral compass, shaping decisions and actions that align with ethical and universal values. A meaningful and peaceful existence is built on dharma and moral duty. These values assist preserve social harmony, give people a sense of direction, and direct them on their path to self-discovery.

Keywords: Dharma, Self-introspection, Moral responsibility, Inner-peace, righteousness

Introduction:

“The peace of God is with them whose mind and soul are in harmony, who are free from desire and wrath who know their own soul” The above verse taken from Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the state of inner peace and harmony reflecting the deep wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita. It implies that people can experience God's heavenly serenity if they harmonize their cravings and wrath. This kind of condition of being which is freed from the chaos of worldly attachments and emotions is reached with self-control, detachment and spiritual understanding. This teaching encourages introspection and pursuit of inner balance for true serenity.

Life is a journey of self-introspection and self-control, both of which lead to the realization and fulfilment of dharma – one's righteous duty and moral responsibility. By engaging in self-introspection, we connect with true essence (atman or soul). This inner awareness helps us recognize the divine spark within fostering a sense of purpose and guiding our actions in harmony with universal laws.

Dharma is multifaceted concept encompassing duty, morality and cosmic order. It is not just about adhering to societal norms but understanding and fulfilling personal duty, moral responsibility and universal harmony. When we practise self-introspection and self-control we naturally align with our dharma. This alignment brings clarity to our purpose contentment in our actions, and harmony in our relationships. The relationship between karma (action and its consequences) and dharma (righteous duty and moral responsibility) is a fundamental concept in Indian Philosophy. At its core, karma is the outcome of one's adherence to or deviation from dharma. The moral and ethical core that directs human behaviour is known as dharma. It is the universal rule of right, modified to fit the role, character, and situation of each individual.

Dharma and moral responsibility are deeply interconnected concepts that guide human behaviour, ethics, and actions. While they may originate from different philosophical and cultural frameworks, they share the same essence, helping individuals and societies distinguished between right and wrong and fostering harmony within oneself and the world. Together they form two sides of the same coin, complementing and reinforcing each other.

Discussion

Every human born into this world has an inherent duty to uphold moral principles are not just societal constructs but essential for personal growth, harmony, and the collective well-being of humanity. When individuals adhere to their moral duties with a sense of responsibility, they contribute to a just, compassionate, and sustainable world. Every human has a role to play in making the world a better place. Responsibility is not a burden but a privilege, an opportunity to live with purpose and create a legacy of positivity for future generations.

Mr. Devdutt Pattanaik, a contemporary Indian mythologist, author, and speaker, has captivated readers with his unique ability to reinterpret ancient Indian texts and mythology in modern context. His works bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and contemporary challenges, encouraging individuals to walk the path of dharma (righteous duty) while embracing moral responsibilities. Through books such as *Jaya*, *Sita*, *The Pregnant King*, and *My Gita*, Pattanaik inspires people and reflect on their actions and align them with universal ethical principles.

Pattanaik highlights that dharma is a dynamic principle that varies according to context, responsibilities, and circumstances rather than being a set or inflexible concept. He

urges people to view dharma as a personal compass that directs them to do actions that uphold social and personal peace. Pattanaik examines the moral quandaries that characters like Yudhishtira, Draupadi, and Karna experience in his retelling of the Mahabharata, Jaya, demonstrating how dharma frequently necessitates tough decisions. He imparts to readers through these tales that dharma entails self-reflection, compassion, and the bravery to maintain morality under trying circumstances.

Every person's dharma is different, influenced by their surroundings, relationships, and abilities, as Pattanaik emphasizes. But this distinctiveness also entails the need to make morally and consciously informed decisions. By emphasizing self-awareness and accountability, he reinterprets the Bhagavad Gita's lessons in My Gita. He points out to readers that one's karma (actions) ought to be consistent with their dharma. Being aware of how these activities affect other people and the wider world is a sign of moral responsibility. Devdutt Pattanaik, known for his deep exploration of Indian mythology and its relevance to modern life, often discusses Dharma (righteousness or duty) and moral responsibility in his works. Below are some notable instances from his books where these themes are explored:

1. "My Gita": The book gives an insight of Bhagavad Gita, The holy book of Hindu from the perspective and understanding. My Gita decodes "The Gita" taking the references and incidents from the two epics "Ramayana" and "Mahabharata". My Gita does not follow the same chapter scheme as that from "The Gita". The author has redesigned it for readers better understanding. The whole book is no less than "The Gita". The book describes each and every aspect of Gita although it does not cover every verse of "The Gita" but contains the essence of each chapter.

This book can change a person's view of life and oneself. Mr. Devdutt Pattanaik has given the readers the book which is very inspirational and life changing. It is full of wisdom. The book has very practical approach of life and living. It teaches how one can have a balance in their life. In short we can say this work offers a modern take on the Bhagavad Gita and shows how its teachings are timeless, helping personal growth & leadership in today's world. "My Gita" In this book Pattanaik emphasizes themes of responsibility, identity, and balance in his contemporary interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita. He discusses how societal roles for men and women are shaped by cultural environments. Pattanaik challenges readers to consider strict gender standards by portraying Krishna as a gender-fluid deity and examining the relationship between identity and dharma (duty). Krishna is portrayed in the Gita as a symbol of Balance and flexibility in the Gita's philosophy, which illustrates the close connections between gender and culture.

2. "Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana". It is Ramakatha. It is a part of Indian Epic. The story is about Lord Rama and Sita's good times and bad times. The story starts with search of Sita's ring by Hanuman, which takes him to Nag Lok where he is asked to narrate the story of Sita and her beloved. So he narrates the story from Sita's birth,

marriage, exile to the forest, abduction by Ravana, rescue, freedom and finally the story ends with an epilogue. At the end of each chapter the author provides us a summary. The theme here is about feminine strength & balance. We see the Ramayana through Sita's eyes. She showcases resilience and grace. Pattanaik highlights Sita's virtues, making it clear that this story isn't just about duty but also equality and women's roles in society.

3. "Jaya: An Illustrated Reading of the Mahabharata" : Jaya is a story of choosing the way of life. The author narrates the story simply weaving the tales with one another. It's about the characters and their behavior leading to great battle in the Kurukshetra ending it with the Pandava's journey to the Himalayas and Yudhisthira's Jaya over himself. Within the pages of " Jaya: An Illustrated Reading of the Mahabharata" the author has skillfully presented Ved Vyasa's rendition of The Mahabharata, and dealt with the concept of Jaya and Vijaya. Vijaya signifies materialistic triumph, while Jaya represents Spiritual victory. The book is sketched with 250 line drawings by the author, 108 chapters. Every character in this story is fantastically portrayed. All the Ved Vyasa's characters are pictured with their vices and virtues. This book discusses about duty (dharma) and shades of right and wrong. Pattanaik dives into human nature complexities. He gives a clear retelling of the Mahabharata while focusing on moral dilemmas faced by its characters. The stories within the book are not presented in lengthy chapters but rather in concise lines or paragraphs.

4. "The Pregnant King": The pregnant king is a mythological fiction. This story is based on the gender biasness and discrimination that still exists in the society. The main protagonist in the novel is Yuvanashva. He is a king and he becomes pregnant and bares a child by drinking a magic potion. Through the story we get introduced to a kingdom called Vallabhi . The king of this kingdom is Yuvanashva, but sadly he is childless despite having three wives. In this novel a tough journey of the king is presented who craves to shower maternal love on his child. The mythology challenges strict societal norms around gender and leadership. Pattanaik tells a thought-provoking story about identity and expectations through a king who becomes pregnant. All his works take traditional Indian stories & give them modern twists, urging readers to question norms around them.

Breaking the Cycle of Karma, the ultimate spiritual aim in Indian philosophy is liberation (moksha), or release from the karma-driven cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, even though upholding dharma produces positive karma. One achieves spiritual emancipation and transcends karma by leading a life based on dharma and distancing oneself from the results of action (as taught in the Bhagavad Gita). Indeed, the result of dharma is karma. Harmony and favourable outcomes are produced when deeds are motivated by moral values. Dharma disregard, on the other hand, has negative effects that upset social and personal equilibrium. People can have meaningful lives, enhance the well-being of society, and move closer to spiritual fulfilment by comprehending and putting this link into practice.

Although maintaining dharma results in positive karma, the ultimate spiritual goal in Indian philosophy is liberation (moksha), or freedom from the karma-driven cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. By living according to dharma and separating oneself from the consequences of one's actions, one attains spiritual liberation and transcends karma (as taught in the Bhagavad Gita). In conclusion, karma is, in fact, the outcome of dharma. When actions are driven by moral principles, harmony and positive results result. Disregard for dharma, however, has detrimental consequences that disturb communal and individual balance. Understanding and implementing this connection can help people have meaningful lives, improve society, and get closer to spiritual fulfilment.

Sita: A Visual Retelling of the Ramayana Through the eyes of Sita, the frequently disregarded heroine, Pattanaik retells the Ramayana in Sita. Pattanaik questions patriarchal tropes by emphasizing her silent power and unshakable dedication to her dharma. She highlights: Empowerment via Duties: Sita's decisions show that upholding dharma can coexist with individual autonomy and self-respect. Feminist Viewpoint: By providing Sita with a voice, Pattanaik speaks to contemporary audiences who are looking for tales of equality and resiliency. The King Who Was Expectant Gender, identity, and the fluidity of dharma are all expertly explored in this book. Pattanaik narrates the narrative of Yuvanashva, a king who falls pregnant, and is based on lesser-known stories from Indian mythology.

My Gita Pattanaik breaks down the lessons of the Bhagavad Gita for readers in the modern era in My Gita. By examining it from a variety of perspectives—practical, spiritual, and psychological—he emphasizes: Subjectivity of Dharma: Every chapter examines how dharma can change according on personal experiences and perceptions. Application in Contemporary Life: Pattanaik shows how the Gita's wisdom can help readers overcome their obstacles in a variety of areas, including personal development and workplace ethics. Using Stories to Build Bridges Ancient stories are made approachable by Pattanaik's captivating narration, which are enhanced by drawings and anecdotes. His narrative approach creates a strong bond with readers, enabling them to identify with the characters and their hardships. Pattanaik's works consistently underline that Dharma is fluid and contextual, requiring introspection, empathy, and a deep understanding of relationships and responsibilities. His storytelling bridges mythology and modern ethical dilemmas, making ancient stories deeply relevant today.

Indian mythology has always been a rich source of guidance on ethics, responsibilities, and the complexities of human life. Among modern interpreters of these timeless tales, Devdutt Pattanaik stands out for his ability to connect ancient stories with contemporary life. His writings on Dharma (righteousness or duty) and moral responsibility offer profound insights that inspire readers to introspect, learn, and navigate their own lives with clarity and purpose. In a world where individuals are often caught between personal ambitions and societal demands, Pattanaik's works offer a roadmap for navigating these

complexities with balance and purpose. By understanding and embracing the essence of Dharma, readers can move forward in life with clarity, compassion, and a deeper sense of responsibility.

Dharma, as Pattanaik explains, is not a rigid set of rules but a fluid and dynamic principle that evolves with context, relationships, and circumstances. Unlike Western ideas of morality, Dharma does not follow absolute truths; instead, it adapts to the needs of time, place, and the individual. Through his works, Pattanaik brings to life the idea that Dharma is not just about societal obligations but also personal growth and harmony. Devdutt Pattanaik's insightful retellings of Indian mythology leave a lasting impact on modern readers, urging them to draw lessons from ancient stories and apply them to their own journeys. By doing so, his works not only preserve the richness of Indian mythology but also ensure its enduring relevance in the contemporary world.

"It is better to follow one's own Dharma, even imperfectly, than to follow another's Dharma perfectly. Death in the pursuit of one's own Dharma is better; following another's Dharma is fraught with danger." – Bhagavad Gita

This verse emphasizes the importance of walking the path of one's own righteous duty (Dharma) rather than imitating others. Life's journey is meaningful and fulfilling when we stay true to our unique roles and responsibilities, even when the path is difficult or uncertain.

Life, at its core, is about discovering purpose, fulfilling responsibilities, and walking the path of righteousness. The concept of Dharma, deeply rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, provides a guiding framework for living a meaningful life. It emphasizes not just personal success but also the well-being of society and harmony with the universe. The teachings of our ancestors remind us that true fulfillment comes from aligning our actions with Dharma and moral duties. Therefore from the above discussion that Devdutt Pattanaik's works inspire the readers to introspect themselves and mend their ways and walk on the path of dharma following their moral duties with honesty.

Conclusion

In conclusion the writings of Devdutt Pattanaik are a lighthouse for anyone looking for direction on how to live a morally upright and meaningful life among life's challenges. He encourages readers to live morally upright and fulfilling lives by reinterpreting ancient wisdom through the prisms of dharma and responsibility. His distinct method guarantees that the timeless lessons of mythology are applicable and useful in the modern world, inspiring people to support social and personal peace.

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