
ADMINISTRATION AND SPIRITUALITY: REINTERPRETING POWER, DUTY AND ETHICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE THROUGH AN INDIGENOUS ADMINISTRATIVE CULTURE OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper begins with a simple question: can India's administrative experience be understood only through imported administrative categories, or does Indian thought offer its own ethical vocabulary for understanding public service? It approaches that question through the relationship between administration and spirituality. It retains a comparative engagement with political realism and Indian civilizational thought and extends that discussion from international power politics to public administration, administrative ethics, leadership, and citizen-oriented governance. The paper argues that Indian traditions do not treat power as intrinsically illegitimate; rather, they place power within a normative framework of duty, welfare, self-restraint, and responsibility. Concepts such as Dharma, Nishkama Karma, Advaita, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Ahimsa, Rajadharma, and Kautilya's welfare-oriented conception of kingship provide conceptual resources for interpreting administrative authority beyond a purely instrumental understanding of power. The analysis also connects these indigenous ideas with modern public administration scholarship on ethics, public service motivation, accountability, administrative values, and spirituality at work. The paper proposes an analytical framework in which administrative power is legitimate when it is exercised through duty, public welfare, integrity, accountability, compassion, and institutional responsibility. It does not advocate replacing constitutional, secular, democratic, or professional standards with religious doctrine. Instead, it proposes that culturally grounded ethical concepts may complement rules by shaping the character and motivations of public officials. The paper concludes that an indigenous administrative culture should be understood as a plural, and constitutional framework rather than a return to a pre-modern state. Such an approach can contribute to decolonising public administration while strengthening ethical governance, citizen trust, and public service in contemporary India. It therefore treats spirituality as an ethical resource, not a sectarian administrative prescription.

Keywords: Administration; Spirituality; Indigenous Administrative Culture; Dharma

INTRODUCTION

The study of International Relations represents a universal academic discipline, yet individual countries develop unique theoretical perspectives, priorities, and intellectual debate. The discipline of IR was born from the Westphalian crucible of European statecraft (Donnelly 2000). It is dominated by paradigms, Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism that offer a particular and parochial understanding of world politics. As the world witnesses the rise of non-Western powers and the resurgence of civilizational identities, the limitations of purely Western theoretical frameworks become increasingly apparent. One of the Western theories, Realism, with its focus on statism, survival, and the anarchic international system, provides a powerful explanatory framework for conflict and power dynamics. It often presents a desiccated vision of human interaction devoid of cultural context, ethical foundations and civilizational depth. As a result, the global conversation on IR has become dominated by a single viewpoint, pushing aside other perspectives from the rest of the world. The argument here is not that Realism should simply be discarded. Its attention to power remains useful; the limitation is that power by itself says little about the purposes for which authority ought to be exercised. It suggests a synthesis, integrating the enduring pragmatic concerns of Realist thought with the profound civilizational insights of Indian tradition. India's emergence as a major global actor presents a fundamental challenge to reimagine how we understand power, diplomacy, and interstate behaviour. The Indian philosophy of spirituality offers a way forward in embracing the concepts of Advaita Vedanta, Dharma, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and Ahimsa. The Indian philosophy and power dynamics can't work together, but they can be combined. Indian civilization has long understood the dynamics of power politics. It didn't reject the idea of power; instead, it developed smart ways to think about it over many years. The excellent examples given in the Bhagavad Gita, a sacred philosophical poem embedded within an epic, serve as a key scripture of Hinduism. During the war between the Kauravas and Pandavas. The warrior Arjuna faces a moral crisis, though he represents the state, possessing immense power. He sees the enemy army and becomes sad, fearing the sin of

killing his relatives. He wants to renounce his power and retreat from his duty (dharma). This is akin to a nation refusing to engage with global politics for fear of moral compromise. With this action of Arjuna, Lord Krishna does not tell Arjuna to abandon power. Instead, Lord Krishna provides a revolutionary philosophy for its use, which is the Bhagavad Gita. He tells Arjuna that as a Kshatriya (warrior/ ruler), Arjuna's dharma is to fight a righteous war. Further, Krishna advises Arjuna to act, but not to be motivated by personal desire for victory, profit, or fame. "Your right is to perform your duty only, but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive." (Gita n.d.)

By excavating concepts from Indian philosophy state craft and strategic culture, we can construct a bridge between the pragmatic recognition of power, central to Realism and a deeper ethical conception of order and purpose. This integration offers a more complex and complete Indian path to reimagining international relations, where the calculation of power is informed by the wisdom of responsibility. By drawing upon concepts such as Dharma (ethical duty and righteous conduct), Advaita Vedanta (Radical oneness), Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam (The world is one family), and Ahimsa (nonviolence). This approach doesn't seek to spiritualize IR, but to ground it in a more holistic strategic and ethically thoughtful framework, offering a reimagined vision of the IRs that is both pragmatic and purposeful. Before going on to further discussion, it is necessary to understand Realism.

Concept of Realism

Realism in the discipline of IR is a school of thought that emphasizes the competitive and conflictual side of International Relations. (Morgenthau 1948). Realism is one of the oldest and most influential theories in the study of international politics. Realism is a dominant theory in IR that views the international system as a state of anarchy (absence of a central world government) where states are the primary actors (Donnelly 2001).

Core assumptions of this realism theory are-

- Statism: The state is the supreme entity and the main actor in international politics.
- Survival: The primary goal of every state is survival and security in a hostile environment (Frankel 1996).
- Self-Help: As there is no higher authority to protect them, states must rely on themselves (self-help). This often leads to the accumulation of power (military and economic) (Donnelly 2000).
- Power Politics: International politics is inherently a power struggle. A state's interests are defined in terms of power (Donnelly 2000).
- Pessimistic View of Human Nature: Classical Realists (like Hans Morgenthau) argue that humans are inherently selfish and lust for power, which translates to the state level (J. 1948.)

Before making the comparison with Indian thought, it helps to revisit the intellectual figures through whom the realist tradition took shape. There are Six such paradigms drawn from Golden Age Athens, sixteenth-century Florence, 17th-century England, and 20th-century America (Donnelly 2000, 21)

Thomas Hobbes

Aftermath of the English civil war, Hobbes developed a foundational realist theory that combines human egoism with the effects of anarchy. His core argument proceeds through several key steps (Donnelly 2000, pg 13, 14). According to him humans are naturally equal - not in virtue or intelligence, but in their capacity to harm one another. This rough equality of capabilities creates universal vulnerability rather than stability. Further, he states that Human nature contains three principal causes of quarrel:

- Competition drives people to invade for gain, as everyone expects to have at least as much as others
- Diffidence (mistrust/fear) leads to pre-emptive strikes, since the best Défense is offense
- Glory causes people to fight over reputation and respect, even over trivial slights

(Hobbes, Thomas 1986.)

In the absence of government, these natural tendencies create a condition where "every man is against every man." This isn't necessarily constant fighting, but a persistent threat of violence where any dispute can escalate. In such a condition, security becomes the first concern. Without security, higher human pursuits become impossible - no arts, letters, or society can develop. Even concepts of right and wrong have no meaning in this state of nature. While humans possess reason and desire peace, they cannot achieve it without a "common power to keep them all in awe" - a sovereign authority strong enough to enforce cooperation. However, this solution only works within states. International relations remain anarchic, with sovereigns like "gladiators"

perpetually ready for conflict. Hobbes presents human nature as fixed and unchangeable - these destructive tendencies can be controlled by superior power but never eliminated, making government essential for civilization but leaving international politics trapped in perpetual conflict (Donnelly 2000, pp. 21,22,23).

Morgenthau Hans J

Hans Morgenthau, a German refugee, later became the most influential realist theorist of the mid-20th century. He established the dominant paradigm in international relations through his systematic articulation of realist principles in "Politics among Nations." Which are as follows-

1. Politics is governed by objective, unchanging laws that stem from fundamental aspects of human nature. This suggests that political behaviour follows predictable patterns that can be studied scientifically, rather than being subject to idealistic hopes about human perfectibility.
2. Political realism follows one main compass when navigating world politics. Countries act in their own interest, and that interest is about power.
3. Power and interest are universal driving forces; their specific content changes across different times and places. What constitutes power and how interests are defined vary with historical context, technological development, and cultural circumstances.
4. we can not apply Universal moral principles directly to state actions. This doesn't mean states are amoral, because the unique nature of international politics - particularly the absence of a world government - creates different moral contexts than those governing individual behaviour.
5. Political realism refuses to equate any particular nation's moral aspirations with universal moral laws. This principle warns against the dangerous tendency for states to assume their values and interests represent the universal good, which can lead to crusading behaviour and unnecessary conflicts.
6. The political realm operates according to its own distinct logic and cannot be reduced to economic, legal, or moral categories. Politics has its own rules and dynamics that must be understood on their own terms rather than through the lens of other disciplines.(Hans Morgenthau 1954, pp 4,5,8,9,10)

Kenneth Waltz

Theory of International politics is the most influential work of Kenneth Waltz in the academic study of IR. He presents an excellent example of strong structural realism. according to him though there are wide variations in the attributes and in interactions of states and other international actors, there is striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia (Kenneth Waltz 1979, pp. 66,67)

Kenneth Waltz argues that state behaviour isn't driven by human nature at all, but rather by the structure of the international system itself. That structure has one defining feature which is anarchy - meaning there's no world government or supreme authority above sovereign states. Because there's no world government, all states - no matter their size, culture, or government type - end up acting similarly

- They put survival first- Due to the anarchic system, states must rely on themselves for their own security and survival
- They worry about being weaker than their neighbours
- They compete for power and influence

(Donnelly 2000, pp. 17,18,19)

This creates predictable patterns. Instead of looking at what makes each country unique (their leaders, culture, or domestic politics), structural realists focus on how the anarchic international system forces all states to behave in roughly the same way.

Thucydides 'Athenian envoys

Around 400 BC, the historian Thucydides wrote about a conversation between powerful Athens and tiny, neutral Melos during a war. During war, Melos, refusing to surrender, fought for independence. Athens won, killed all the men, and enslaved the women and children. On this, Athens argued that-

- Morality only matters between equals
- When there's a power difference, the stronger side makes the rules
- This isn't good or bad - it's just how the world works (Donnelly 2000, pp 23,24)

This ancient text became a classic example of realist thinking - the idea that international politics is ultimately about power, not justice or morality. It shows this worldview is thousands of years old.

Niccolò Machiavelli

He is the great sixteenth-century Florentine diplomat, historian, theorist, and playwright. Machiavelli was of a low opinion of human nature. According to him, it is insatiable, arrogant, crafty, and shifting, and above all else, malignant, iniquitous, violent, and savage (Donnelly 2000, pp. 25, 26)

- The Core ideas of Machiavelli's Realist View of Politics can be summarised as follows-
- Power comes first: Leaders should focus on war and military strength, and it should be above everything else
- Force enables law: You need "good arms" before you can have "good laws," which means military power makes legal systems possible
- Results matter most: People judge leaders by whether they succeed, not by how moral their methods were
- "The ends justify the means": If a ruler wins and keeps power, people will call their methods honourable

There is another point here: he explains Why Violence is Sometimes Necessary:

- Humans are naturally selfish and evil
- Sometimes, only brutal force can control people's worst impulses
- Even good leaders must be willing to "enter into evil when forced by necessity"

In Machiavelli's view, politics is harsh and amoral. Successful leaders must be willing to use violence and cruelty when needed. Idealism and moral purity are luxuries that lead to failure and ruin (Donnelly 2000, 24,25, 26).

Realism and Indian Philosophy of Spirituality

Indian Philosophy of Spirituality is a branch of philosophical thought that explores the nature, meaning, and implications of spiritual experience and existence. It goes beyond formal religion and focuses on the underlying, deeper aspect of life. The key aspect of spirituality is consciousness, which is the essence of being unity/oneness. Many philosophies emphasize interconnectedness of all life, transcendence that is moving beyond the material or ego-bound self to experience higher trust, inner transformation, emphasis on self-awareness, ethics, and personal growth (R. Sarvepalli, C.A. Moore 1957, xxii, xxiii)

Almost all Indian philosophy (Vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharat-Shanti parva, Buddhism, etc.) believes that reality is ultimately one and ultimately spiritual (R. Sarvepalli, C.A. Moore 1957, xxv). The Indian philosophy of spirituality offers a way forward in embracing the concepts of Advaita Vedanta, Dharma, Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam, and Ahimsa. The Indian philosophy and power dynamics can't work together, but they can be combined. Indian civilization has long understood the dynamics of power politics. It didn't reject the idea of power; instead, it developed smart ways to think about it over many years.

Realism's Atomistic state Vs Advaita's Non-dualism

The core principles of realism's atomistic state include discrete, independent units that exist objectively, separate from consciousness. The Advaita's non-dualism is a profound philosophical system that asserts the fundamental unity of all existence. The core principles include that the ultimate reality (Brahman) is singular. Aham Brahmani (I am Brahman) means I am the ultimate reality (Yajnavalkya 7th-6th century BCE, I-4-10).

Atomistic realism starts with the parts and builds up to the whole. At the same time, Advaita begins with the whole and explains parts as apparent divisions (Deutsch 1988). Advaita states that the world is an illusory appearance (Maya). It is of separate states, people, and objects that are not the ultimate truth. It is relatively conventional (Deutsch 1988, 04,83,99). It states that reality is unified and peaceful. It is a state of perfect unity, peace, and consciousness. The sense of separation is the root cause of all suffering.

Realism takes the world of separate states as the fundamental, only reality. While Advaita states that this world of separation is itself a grand illusion (Maya), and the truth is radical oneness. Realism defines the state as sovereign and a key actor in international politics. It is a unitary rational actor whose identity is defined by its

borders, national interest, and sovereignty (Mearsheimer, J. J 2001). Advaita Vedanta gives the concept of the true self, which is for every being, is identical to the ultimate reality. Which in IR would be the state. Realism is built on the irreducible separateness of the selves (state). Advaita is built on the irreducible unity of selves. The problem of Realism is anarchy and the perpetual struggle for power and security among states. The ultimate goal is survival. The realism revolves around the concept of power and action. The power is defined in terms of military capability, economic strength and geopolitical influence. Action such as diplomacy, war, alliances is a tool to maximize power and security for the state. It is guided by national interest which is often amoral. Advaita states that the only true power is the power of consciousness. Material power is transient and part of the illusory world (Maya). It further gives the concept of Nishkam Karma-means one should perform their duties in the world but without attachment to the results, understanding that the world of action is part of the relative reality, not the absolute. The goal of action is not to accumulate power for a separate self but to play one's part in the cosmic play (R. Sarvepalli, C.A. Moore 1957).

Realism and Dharma

Dharma is a central complex and untranslatable concept in Indian Philosophies like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It is not a single rigid law but a multifaceted principle of cosmic order and duty (R. Sarvepalli, C.A. Moore 1957). Dharma is the fundamental principle that upholds the universe, maintaining harmony and balance. Dharma refers to one's righteous duty or obligation. Dharma gives an ethical and moral path. To follow one's dharma is to live a life of virtue, integrity, and harmony with the cosmic order (Jayadayal Goyandaka 2022, 140, 259,358). In short, dharma is a normative and ethical concept focused on right action, duty, and cosmic harmony. Realism demonstrates the game of power politics. When countries pursue power without caring about ethics or morality, it is called Adharma (Against righteous duty). It might work in the short run, but it creates bigger problems later. A country might gain immediate security by acting ruthlessly, using force, or betraying allies, but this creates cycles of revenge, makes other countries distrust you, and leads to constant security threats. The true lasting security comes from acting ethically (Dharma), keeping your word, treating others fairly, and building genuine trust. The fundamental analysis of Dharma Vs Realism will be clearer with a compelling historical example of Nazi Germany (1933-1945). Which is a game of power and a neo-political approach. Hitler's Germany pursued pure power politics such as breaking treaties, invading neighbors, using deception and brutality. By 1942 with such actions Nazi Germany controlled most of Europe, achieved unprecedented security and power. But the long term consequences of this Adharma included conquered population turned into resistance movements. The potential allies like Soviet Union became enemy due to Germany's treaty breaking behaviour. Aggressive expansion forced Germany to fight on multiple fronts (William L. Shirer 1981). But post World War II (1945) Germany adopted the dharmic approach, which included-

- After complete defeat, West Germany choose radical ethical transformation over revenge or power politics
- Openly acknowledged past wrongs, paid reparations, and committed to peaceful cooperation
- Built relationships based on mutual benefit rather than domination
- They Confronted Nazi crimes honestly rather than denying them
- Paid billions in reparations to Holocaust survivors and Israel
- Joined NATO and EU as an equal partner, not seeking dominance
- Focused on trade and mutual prosperity instead of territorial conquest

This way of looking at the issue benefited a lot-

- Former enemies became allies: France, once Germany's historic rival, became closest partner
- Stable borders: No security threats from neighbors who now trust German intentions
- Economic prosperity: Became Europe's economic powerhouse through cooperation
- Moral authority: Germany's voice now carries weight precisely because of its ethical transformation.

(Darja Malahova 2018)

This is the same country that, under adharma principles, had controlled most of Europe through force but ended up completely destroyed. Under dharmic principles, Germany achieved far greater real security and prosperity

than it ever had through military conquest. Post-war Germany shows how a country can build lasting security through ethical behavior, honest acknowledgment of past wrongs, and genuine commitment to mutual benefit. The result has been 80 years of peace, prosperity, and genuine security - something military power alone never delivered. In conclusion, we can say that this is the same country that, under adharmic principles, had controlled most of Europe through force but ended up destroyed. Under dharmic principles, Germany achieved far greater real security and prosperity than it ever had through military conquest.

Realism and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (Sanskrit: वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्).

The concepts of Realism and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offer two opposed visions of how the world is structured and how states should behave. Realism views the international system as anarchic (lacking a central world government) so as competitive. States are the primary actors, and their main goal is survival in a dangerous, self-help environment (Frankel 1996). Underlying key Principles of realism are Statism, Survival, Self-Help: Power Politics. In short, Realism characterizes international relations as an anarchic system where states pursue self-interest through power competition, with stronger nations inevitably dominating weaker ones (Donnelly 2000). Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is an ancient Indian philosophy, found in the Maha Upanishad, which states that "The World is One Family." It is a vision of cosmic unity and deep interdependence.

Underlying Key Principles of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam are

Non-Duality (Advaita): This concept is a core concept, rooted in the Advaitic idea. It suggests that all of creation is a manifestation of a single, divine consciousness (Brahman). The perception of separation is an illusion (Maya).

Interconnectedness: This principle underlines that the well-being of one is tied to the well-being of all. If anyone is harming another is ultimately harming a part of the whole.

Ethical Duty (Dharma): Dharma implies a moral responsibility to treat all beings with compassion, respect, and a sense of shared duty, as one would treat family members.

Cooperation over Conflict: Considering as natural state of the "family", leads to harmony, requiring cooperation and mutual support to resolve disputes.

Put differently, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam shifts the moral horizon beyond the individual state and places human beings, society and the wider cosmos within a field of relationship. By comparing the various aspects of Realism and Vasudhaiv Kutumbaakam, the concept will be clearer.

View of World order- In Realism world is considered as anarchic and Competitive, which is defined by the absence of a supreme authority (Donnelly 2000). While Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam depicts interconnectedness and unity, where a cosmic family bond is shared by essence and purpose. Further we can give a comparative analysis and fundamental clash between realism and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Aspect Realism Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

View of World Order Anarchic and Competitive: here a system is defined by the absence of a supreme authority. **Interconnected and Unified:** Here a cosmic family is bounded by a shared essence and purpose.

Primary Unit The Sovereign State but separate, & self-interested entity. **The Whole Cosmos** that is a single, unified entity where states are artificial borders.

View of the "Other" The existence of other states with power are considered as a source of insecurity. **The "other"** is considered as a brother, sister, or part of the same universal family.

Core Goal Survival and Security of the individual state through accumulation of power. **Harmony and Well-being** of the entire global family through ethical conduct and duty.

Means of Security Balance of Power, military strength, deterrence, alliances (for temporary gain). **Cooperation, Dialogue, Dharma** (righteousness), and mutual understanding.

Concept of Power Power is considered as the ability to make others act through force, resources, or rewards/punishments **Power** is considered as the ability to uphold Dharma and create welfare for all.

Underlying Philosophy The world is fundamentally divided into independent, competing units. **The world** is fundamentally one, and separation is an illusion.

Indigenous Administrative Culture: From Power to Public Service

“Indigenous administrative culture” should not mean that everything pre-colonial was administratively superior or that modern India should return to an ancient institutional form. India’s administrative culture has developed through multiple historical layers, including classical political thought, regional and community institutions, colonial administration, constitutional democracy and contemporary reforms. The relevant question is whether indigenous normative resources can strengthen the purposes and values of present-day administration.

Public administration is not merely an organizational technology. It allocates resources, exercises authority, interprets rules and delivers public services. Classical administrative scholarship itself demonstrates that administration contains questions of values, responsibility and public purpose (Waldo, 1948, pp. 5–12). Contemporary public service approaches likewise emphasize citizenship, public interest and service rather than treating citizens merely as customers (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015, pp. 42–65). This provides an intellectual basis for examining culturally grounded ideas of duty and ethical responsibility.

Kautilya is especially relevant because the Arthashastra combines strategic realism with administration, economic management, security and welfare. The famous principle that the ruler’s happiness lies in the happiness of the subjects and the ruler’s welfare in their welfare connects authority with public welfare (Kautilya, trans. Rangarajan, 1992, p. 149; Kangle, 1972, Part II, p. 47). In administrative terms, authority is therefore not merely possession of power; it carries a responsibility toward those affected by its exercise.

Administrative Spirituality and Contemporary Governance

Spirituality is used here in a broad ethical sense rather than as an institutional endorsement of any particular religion. It concerns questions of meaning, self-discipline, interconnectedness, moral responsibility and compassion. This distinction is essential in a constitutional democracy. Research on public administration suggests that personal spirituality can be related to public-service motivation, ethical decision making and leadership (Bruce, 2002, pp. 5–16. Houston & Cartwright, 2007, pp. 88–102; King, 2007, pp. 103–114). Hossain et al. (2020) similarly identify spirituality as one possible resource for moral reflection and positive organizational behaviour.

The Bhagavad Gita’s teaching of Nishkama Karma is especially relevant to administrative ethics. Gita 2.47 links the right to action with freedom from attachment to the fruits of action. Interpreted administratively, the principle encourages officials to treat office as a duty rather than a personal entitlement. It does not mean that results are irrelevant; rather, it challenges the use of public responsibility for personal reward. The distinction is important for understanding corruption, patronage and conflicts of interest.

This ethical orientation can also be related to administrative discretion. Simon (1946, pp. 36–44) demonstrated that decision makers operate with limitations of information and rationality. Rules cannot eliminate every ethical dilemma. An internal commitment to duty and self-restraint may therefore complement formal procedures, although whether spirituality actually improves administrative behaviour remains an empirical question.

Rajadharma, Welfare and Accountability

Kautilyan statecraft demonstrates that Indian political thought cannot be reduced to spirituality or pacifism. It recognizes strategic calculation, coercion, security, taxation and power. At the same time, it connects political authority with welfare and disciplined conduct (Kautilya, trans. Rangarajan, 1992, pp. 91–93, 149). This combination is important for the present argument. Realism helps explain why institutions protect interests and respond to threats; Dharma adds the normative question of how power ought to be exercised.

Gandhian trusteeship provides another bridge between power and responsibility. Gandhi treated wealth and authority as carrying obligations toward society and emphasized restraint, non-violence and public welfare (Gandhi, 1998, pp. 39–40). In administrative practice, trusteeship can be interpreted as stewardship of public funds, responsible use of official authority, impartial service and protection of citizens’ interests.

This interpretation converges with the Second Administrative Reforms Commission’s emphasis on integrity, transparency, fairness, justice and accountability. The Commission explicitly states that public office should be treated as a trust and stresses that rules alone cannot guarantee ethical conduct (Government of India, 2007, pp. 2–4). The convergence should not be mistaken for historical equivalence. Modern public administration is constitutionally different from ancient kingship. The value of comparison lies in showing that ethical administration has resources within Indian intellectual history as well as within modern administrative theory.

Constitutional and Institutional Boundaries

An indigenous administrative culture must remain within India’s constitutional framework. Spirituality cannot justify discrimination, coercion or preferential treatment. Public officials must act through law, equality,

fundamental rights, democratic accountability and professional standards. Indigenous administrative culture should therefore be understood as a source of ethical reflection, not as a substitute for constitutional authority.

This boundary is also important for the concept of indigenous knowledge itself. India's traditions are plural and include Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, tribal, regional and other intellectual and community traditions. A serious indigenous-administration project should therefore avoid presenting one tradition as the exclusive definition of Indian culture. The broader research agenda should examine multiple traditions and distinguish between philosophical concepts, religious doctrines, historical institutions and contemporary administrative practices.

A possible analytical framework emerging from the discussion is a "Dharma–Welfare–Accountability" orientation. Dharma represents right conduct and responsibility; welfare represents the purpose of administration in relation to citizens; and accountability supplies the institutional control necessary to prevent subjective moral claims from becoming unchecked discretion. Duty without accountability can become paternalism; accountability without ethical motivation can become proceduralism; welfare without legality can become arbitrary benevolence. Their combination provides a balanced way to conceptualize ethical public administration.

The framework can be translated into six administrative values: duty, welfare, integrity, self-restraint, compassion and accountability. These values can be studied empirically through measures of ethical decision making, citizen orientation, public-service motivation, discretionary conduct and organizational trust. Future research may examine whether exposure to Indian philosophical texts or reflective ethics training is associated with measurable changes in administrative attitudes and behaviour.

The wider implication for public administration is that decolonisation need not mean rejecting modern institutions. It can mean widening the intellectual foundations through which those institutions are interpreted. Weberian bureaucracy, Simonian decision theory, constitutional accountability and contemporary citizen-centred administration can coexist with Indian concepts of Dharma, Rajadharma, Nishkama Karma and trusteeship. The objective is a culturally informed but constitutionally bounded administrative culture in which public power is understood as responsibility, public office as trust and administration as service.

CONCLUSION

Realism and Indian civilizational thought need not be understood as mutually exclusive intellectual traditions. At first sight, they appear to begin from very different assumptions. Realism starts from the realities of power, insecurity, competition and the absence of a central authority in international politics. Indian philosophical traditions, by contrast, place considerable emphasis on ethical conduct, duty, self-discipline, interconnectedness and the larger consequences of human action. Yet this difference should not lead to the conclusion that Indian thought is detached from the realities of power. A closer reading suggests something more useful. Indian civilizational thought does not necessarily deny power; rather, it raises the prior question of how power ought to be understood, exercised and directed.

The realist tradition has made an important contribution precisely because it refuses to treat international politics as a realm in which good intentions automatically produce good outcomes. From Thucydides and Machiavelli to Morgenthau and Waltz, realist thinkers have repeatedly drawn attention to insecurity, competition and the constraints imposed by power. Hobbes's account of insecurity and the absence of a common authority, Machiavelli's emphasis on necessity and statecraft, Morgenthau's conception of interest defined in terms of power, and Waltz's structural explanation of state behaviour all highlight different dimensions of the same basic problem: political actors operate in an environment in which they cannot simply assume that others will behave according to their expectations. This remains an important insight for contemporary international politics.

The difficulty begins when the description of political reality is treated as a complete account of political purpose. Realism is particularly strong at explaining why states compete, why they seek security and why power matters. It is less equipped, at least in its classical and structural forms, to answer a different question: what should power ultimately be used for? If survival becomes the only measure of political success, then almost any action can potentially be justified in the name of national interest. The accumulation of military, economic or strategic capability may increase a state's capacity to act, but capability by itself does not establish whether that action is legitimate, responsible or sustainable. This is where Indian civilizational thought can make a distinctive contribution—not by replacing realist analysis, but by placing power within a wider ethical framework.

Advaita Vedanta offers one way of reconsidering the assumptions underlying an atomistic understanding of political life. It does not require states to behave as though the international system has ceased to be competitive, nor does it imply that political identities and territorial boundaries are meaningless in everyday political practice. The distinction between conventional or transactional reality and ultimate reality is important here. At the level of *vyavahara*, institutions, identities, duties and social relationships continue to matter. Political actors must therefore operate within the world as it exists. At the same time, Advaitic thought questions the assumption that apparent separateness is the deepest or final condition of reality. This creates an intellectual opening for thinking about international relations beyond permanent antagonism.

Seen in this way, Advaita does not provide a ready-made theory of international relations. Its value is more foundational. It challenges the tendency to treat separation, competition and self-interest as self-evident and final categories. If political actors are understood as interconnected rather than completely isolated entities, cooperation need not be regarded merely as a temporary arrangement imposed by calculations of interest. It can also be understood as consistent with a broader conception of human and social interdependence. This does not eliminate conflict or competition. Rather, it changes the moral horizon within which those realities are interpreted.

The concept of *Dharma* takes the argument one step further. Dharma is not easily translated into the modern administrative vocabulary of “law,” “morality” or “duty,” because it carries a wider meaning associated with sustaining order, fulfilling obligations and acting appropriately within a moral and social framework. For the purposes of this discussion, its importance lies in the idea that power carries responsibility. Authority is not merely a possession; it creates obligations. A ruler, administrator or political actor cannot be evaluated only by the amount of power acquired or by immediate strategic success. The manner in which that power is exercised and the consequences that follow from it also matter.

This distinction becomes particularly important when considering the history of Nazi Germany. Nazi expansion demonstrates that enormous military and political power can produce rapid territorial gains without producing lasting security. Aggression, treaty violations, coercion and domination generated resistance, destroyed trust and ultimately placed Germany in a position of catastrophic strategic vulnerability. The lesson should not be reduced to a simplistic claim that Germany moved from “*adharma*” to “*dharma*” after 1945. Such a formulation would risk imposing an Indian philosophical category too directly upon a complex European historical experience. A more defensible interpretation is that post-war Germany illustrates the practical importance of institutions, accountability, reconciliation, cooperation and restraint after the destruction caused by unchecked power politics. The transformation of Germany's relationship with its former enemies, particularly through European integration, demonstrates that durable security can emerge from cooperation and institutional trust rather than perpetual domination.

The comparison therefore helps clarify the relationship between power and ethics. Ethical conduct should not be understood as an alternative to national security. In many circumstances, it can become one of the conditions of long-term security. Trust reduces the costs of cooperation. Institutional legitimacy makes agreements more durable. Reputation affects diplomatic credibility. Responsible conduct can create relationships that coercion alone cannot sustain. From this perspective, ethical behaviour is not necessarily a withdrawal from power politics. It can itself become a form of political and strategic capacity.

The idea of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* adds another dimension to this argument. Its significance lies not simply in the attractive phrase that “the world is one family,” but in the change it introduces in the moral unit of analysis. Realism generally begins with the sovereign state and asks how that state can survive and protect its interests within an anarchic international system. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* begins from a broader conception of interconnectedness. The welfare of one cannot be completely detached from the welfare of others. This does not mean that national interests disappear. India, like every other state, must protect its sovereignty, security and developmental interests. Rather, the concept suggests that national interest can coexist with a wider conception of responsibility.

This distinction is especially relevant in an increasingly interconnected world. Climate change, pandemics, cyber threats, terrorism, migration, food security and economic instability do not respect political borders. A state may possess considerable military capability and still remain vulnerable to problems that cannot be solved through military power alone. In such circumstances, the realist concern with survival remains relevant, but the meaning of security itself becomes broader. Security increasingly depends upon cooperation, institutional capacity, trust and collective action. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* therefore provides a civilizational vocabulary through which such interdependence can be understood.

Krishna's counsel to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* provides a particularly useful illustration of this combined perspective. Arjuna does not face a simple choice between power and morality. His dilemma arises precisely because political and moral obligations appear to conflict. Krishna's response is not to tell him to abandon action altogether. Instead, action must be performed in accordance with duty and without excessive attachment to its personal fruits. The significance of this principle for the present argument is not that the *Gita* provides a direct manual for modern foreign policy or public administration. It does not. Its relevance lies in its treatment of action, responsibility, motivation and ethical discipline. Political withdrawal is not automatically virtuous, just as political action is not automatically legitimate. What matters is the purpose, responsibility and ethical orientation underlying action.

This provides a useful corrective to two extremes. The first is naïve idealism, which assumes that ethical intentions are sufficient to overcome material constraints. The second is an overly deterministic realism, which assumes that competition and self-interest exhaust the possibilities of political life. Indian civilizational thought creates space between these extremes. It accepts the necessity of action while asking the actor to cultivate self-restraint, duty and responsibility. In this sense, *Nishkama Karma* can be read as an ethical discipline of action rather than as political passivity.

The significance of this synthesis becomes even clearer when the discussion is brought closer to administration. Public administration is ultimately concerned with the exercise of authority on behalf of society. Administrators possess institutional power, but that power is expected to serve public purposes rather than personal interests. Rules, procedures and formal accountability mechanisms are indispensable, yet administrative ethics cannot always be reduced to compliance with rules. Public officials routinely encounter situations in which discretion, competing interests and uncertain consequences require judgment. An indigenous administrative culture informed by concepts such as *Dharma*, duty, welfare, restraint and interconnectedness could therefore contribute to the ethical vocabulary of public service.

This does not mean replacing constitutionalism, professional standards or modern administrative institutions with religious doctrine. Such an approach would be neither appropriate nor compatible with India's constitutional framework. The more productive proposition is to examine how civilizational concepts can inform ethical reflection while remaining subject to constitutional values, equality, legality, democratic accountability and individual rights. In this formulation, spirituality is not a substitute for administration. It becomes one possible source of ethical orientation within administration.

For India, therefore, the significance of this synthesis is practical as well as intellectual. India does not need to present its civilizational ideas as an exotic alternative to Western political theory. Nor does it need to reject the considerable explanatory contributions made by Western scholarship. The more meaningful task is to enter the theoretical conversation from a position of intellectual confidence: to identify what established theories explain well, identify what they leave insufficiently examined, and then investigate whether Indian intellectual traditions offer concepts capable of extending the analysis.

This is particularly important for the development of an indigenous administrative culture. Indigenous does not necessarily mean the wholesale rejection of modern institutions or the romanticisation of India's past. India today is a constitutional democracy with a complex administrative state, modern bureaucracy, technological governance and global economic connections. An indigenous administrative culture must therefore be capable of operating within these contemporary realities. Its indigenous character would lie not in abandoning modern administration but in examining how India's own intellectual and civilizational resources can contribute to the purposes, ethics and orientation of administration.

In this sense, the proposed synthesis can be understood as a movement from power to responsible power, from authority to accountable authority, and from administration as procedure to administration as public duty. Realism reminds us that power cannot be ignored. Indian civilizational thought reminds us that power cannot be the final criterion by which political and administrative action is judged. Advaita introduces the idea of interconnectedness at the deepest philosophical level; Dharma introduces responsibility and right action; *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* expands the moral horizon beyond narrow self-interest; and the *Gita* emphasises disciplined action without attachment to personal reward.

The argument, therefore, is not that Realism is wrong and Indian philosophy is right. Such a conclusion would oversimplify both traditions. Realism captures an important dimension of political reality—the persistence of power, insecurity and strategic competition. Indian civilizational thought addresses another dimension: the ethical orientation of action and the relationship between individual conduct, social order and collective welfare.

Their dialogue can consequently produce a more multidimensional understanding of political and administrative behaviour.

For this reason, Indian thought can be said to provincialize Realism without discarding it. Realism can be understood as a powerful account of the anarchic and competitive surface of international politics, but not necessarily as a complete account of political life. Its categories become more productive when they are placed alongside questions of duty, legitimacy, welfare, ethical restraint and interconnectedness. The objective is not to spiritualize international relations or administration. It is to ask whether power, which is an unavoidable feature of political life, can be exercised within a framework that gives equal attention to responsibility and purpose.

The larger implication for the study of administration is equally important. If administrative institutions are understood only as mechanisms for implementing decisions, then questions of character, ethical motivation, social responsibility and civilizational values remain secondary. If administration is understood as the exercise of public authority for collective welfare, however, these questions become central. The exploration of an indigenous administrative culture of India must therefore examine not only institutions and procedures but also the ideas that have historically shaped Indian understandings of authority, duty, welfare and social order.

The proposed framework should consequently be treated as an invitation to further empirical and theoretical inquiry rather than as a completed doctrine. The central question is not whether ancient Indian concepts can simply be transferred into contemporary administration. They cannot. The more serious question is whether these concepts, after careful interpretation and constitutional adaptation, can help explain dimensions of administrative ethics and public service that remain insufficiently captured by conventional administrative theory. That question provides the foundation for a broader research programme on administration and spirituality in India.

Ultimately, the value of this synthesis lies in its refusal to choose between realism and ethics. Power matters, but so does the purpose for which power is exercised. Institutions matter, but so does the character of those who operate them. Security matters, but durable security may depend upon trust, legitimacy and cooperation as much as coercive capacity. Administration requires authority, but authority acquires legitimacy when it is connected with public welfare and responsibility. In this sense, Indian civilizational thought does not ask political and administrative actors to withdraw from the world of action. It asks them to enter that world with a stronger awareness of duty, consequence and interconnectedness. That is perhaps the most significant contribution that an exploration of India's indigenous administrative culture can make to contemporary public administration.

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