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From Ancient Wisdom to Corporate Strategy: A Conceptual Framework Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into Sustainable Human Capital and Consumer Engagement Practices

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Abstract

India is working toward Bharat@2047, a vision of a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) that must be economically competitive, ecologically responsible, and rooted in its own culture. The management ideas we use to get there matter. Current Human Resource Management (HRM) and marketing scholarship leans heavily on Western behavioral and transactional models. These models are analytically strong, but they tend to overlook indigenous ways of knowing that could build sustainability into an organisation's values instead of treating it as compliance. This conceptual paper turns to Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), namely Vedantic philosophy, the Bhagavad Gita, Kautilya's Arthashastra, and the Buddhist-Jain ethical traditions. From these, it draws six constructs (Dharma, Karma Yoga, Triguna, Aparigraha, Seva and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) and links them to two applied areas of management: sustainable human capital development and consumer engagement. Building on literature from Indian management philosophy, sustainable HRM and ethical marketing, the paper proposes a "Dharmic Sustainability Model". In this model IKS constructs sit upstream as value-drivers that shape organisational practice. On the human capital side these practices cover recruitment, motivation, leadership and employee well-being. On the marketing side they cover trust-based branding, responsible-consumption messaging and community-centred engagement. Together they are expected to lead to triple-bottom-line outcomes that fit the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and India's development priorities for 2047. The framework is meant to be useful to both scholars and practitioners who want management models that are sustainable and culturally congruent, and the paper closes with an agenda for testing it empirically in Indian organisations.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge Systems; Sustainable HRM; Consumer Engagement; Bharat 2047; Dharma; Sustainable Development Goals; Indian Management Philosophy*

1. Introduction

India's journey toward the centenary of its independence in 2047 has been framed by policymakers as the vision of a Viksit Bharat, a developed nation that is prosperous, inclusive and sustainable all at once. This aspiration arrives at a time when management theory itself is being reconsidered worldwide. Scholars and practitioners are asking whether models built mainly in Euro-American industrial settings can serve economies facing climate stress, scarce resources and growing inequality. In that debate, Indian Knowledge Systems have come back into view as a legitimate but under-used resource. By IKS we mean the philosophical, ethical and administrative wisdom found in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Kautilya's Arthashastra and the Buddhist and Jain canons.

Two developments show that this recovery is now institutional. India's National Education Policy 2020 includes IKS, and IKS centres have multiplied across Indian universities. The aim is to bring back indigenous ways of knowing and



to test whether they still matter for modern disciplines, management among them. Two management functions look especially well suited to this. The first is Human Resource Management (HRM), which deals with how people are developed, motivated and looked after. Indian philosophical traditions have worked on exactly these concerns for thousands of years, through ideas of self-realisation, duty and detached action. The second is marketing and consumer engagement. These are increasingly expected to go beyond persuasion and create value that is responsible, trust-based and community-oriented, which fits well with Indian ethical ideas such as Dharma (righteous conduct), Satya (truthfulness) and Aparigraha (non-accumulation).

This paper responds to the conference theme "Indian Knowledge System and Sustainable Development: Interdisciplinary Perspectives for Bharat 2047" and asks one focused question for the management stream: how can the core constructs of Indian Knowledge Systems be built into sustainable human capital and consumer engagement practices in a way that is theoretically coherent and workable in practice? To answer it, the paper develops a conceptual framework called the Dharmic Sustainability Model. The model treats IKS as a base of values from which specific sustainability-oriented HR and marketing practices can be derived, and which in turn feed into India's wider developmental and ecological goals for 2047.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Indian Knowledge Systems: An Overview

Indian Knowledge Systems are plural and internally diverse. They cover philosophy (darshana), ethics, statecraft, medicine and the arts, and they developed over several millennia across Vedantic, Buddhist, Jain and regional folk traditions. IKS is therefore less a single doctrine than a repertoire of ideas. Later scholars of Indian management thought have drawn on this repertoire, most notably S. K. Chakraborty, whose work on values-based management at IIM Calcutta set out an "Indian ethos" in management. That ethos stresses self-development, holistic well-being and action guided by duty more than by outcomes alone. The constructs cited most often in this literature are Dharma (righteous duty), Karma Yoga (the discipline of selfless action taught in the Bhagavad Gita), the Triguna theory of personality (the interplay of sattva, rajas and tamas), Purushartha (the four aims of human life: dharma, artha, kama and moksha) and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family).

2.2 Sustainability and Human Resource Management: Global and Indian Perspectives

Over the last two decades, green and sustainable HRM has grown into a mature field. It has widened the traditional HR functions of recruitment, training, performance management and employee relations so that they take account of environmental and social responsibility as well as economic performance. Most of this work, though, rests on Western organisational behaviour theory, such as the resource-based view and stakeholder theory, and it usually treats sustainability as a strategic or compliance-driven matter. A smaller but growing body of Indian management writing, for example the scholarship on how the Bhagavad Gita applies to leadership and motivation, takes a different line. It argues that in the Indian context sustainable HRM can be anchored in indigenous ideas of selfless service (Seva), detached action (Nishkama Karma) and holistic personal development. The last of these draws on the Panchakosha, the five-sheath model of the person found in the Taittiriya Upanishad. The shared claim in this work is that sustainable behaviour among employees lasts longer when it comes from values they have internalised than when it depends on external incentives alone.

2.3 Consumer Engagement and Marketing Ethics through an Indian Lens

Marketing scholarship shows a parallel shift. Relationship marketing, conscious consumption and purpose-driven branding have gained ground as alternatives to transactional, persuasion-heavy models. Indian ethical traditions have a good deal to offer here. Aparigraha (non-possessiveness, or restraint in accumulation) gives a philosophical basis for messaging that promotes responsible and minimal consumption. Ahimsa (non-harm) fits product design that is mindful of the environment and of society. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam supports inclusive, community-oriented brand positioning, in which consumers and communities are treated as extended family and not as market segments to be extracted from. India's mercantile traditions add a practical example. Indigenous business communities long relied on relational, reputation-based trust (Vishwas) in place of purely contractual exchange, and this offers a template for trust-centred consumer engagement today.



2.4 Research Gap

Even though these two streams run side by side, the literature on IKS-informed HRM and the literature on IKS-informed marketing have mostly developed separately. They are rarely brought together in one framework that is explicitly about sustainability and tied to a national development horizon such as Bharat 2047. Conceptual work is limited on three fronts: (a) identifying a common set of IKS constructs that applies to both HR and marketing, (b) turning those constructs into specific practices that organisations can act on, and (c) linking those practices to sustainability outcomes and national policy priorities. This paper takes up that gap.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the core constructs of Indian Knowledge Systems that bear directly on sustainable management practice.
- To develop an integrative conceptual framework that links these constructs to sustainable Human Resource Management practices.
- To develop a parallel conceptual framework that links the same constructs to sustainable consumer engagement and marketing practices.
- To place the resulting integrated model within India's Sustainable Development Goals commitments and the Bharat 2047 vision.

4. Research Methodology

This is a conceptual paper. It takes an interpretive, theory-building approach and does not collect primary empirical data. The framework was built by synthesising three streams of literature: (i) primary and secondary sources on Indian philosophy and Indian management thought, including the Bhagavad Gita, the Arthashastra and scholarly commentary on the Indian ethos in management; (ii) peer-reviewed work on sustainable and green HRM; and (iii) peer-reviewed work on ethical, relationship, and sustainability-oriented marketing. Constructs that kept recurring in the IKS literature were extracted and then mapped, theme by theme, onto established HR and marketing functions to see where they converge. The mapping was arranged as a layered model that moves from foundational values to functional practices and then to organisational and national outcomes, which is a common way of developing conceptual frameworks in management research. Because this is a conceptual contribution, the paper does not test causal relationships. It offers testable propositions instead, to guide later empirical work, as outlined in Section 8.

5. Conceptual Framework: The Dharmic Sustainability Model

The proposed Dharmic Sustainability Model arranges IKS constructs in three layers: (1) foundational philosophical constructs, (2) functional management practices derived from those constructs in HR and marketing, and (3) sustainability and national-development outcomes. Each layer is described below.

5.1 Foundational IKS Constructs

Six constructs recur across the literature and form the philosophical foundation of the model. Dharma means righteous conduct that suits the context. It gives organisational decisions an ethical compass that goes ahead of, and beyond, regulatory compliance. Karma Yoga comes from the Bhagavad Gita and is the discipline of committed action carried out without undue attachment to results. It offers a basis for motivation that is intrinsic and driven by purpose. The Triguna framework describes personality and behaviour as a shifting interplay of sattva (clarity, balance), rajas (activity, ambition) and tamas (inertia), and it can serve as a diagnostic lens for leadership style and organisational culture. Aparigraha, or non-accumulation, counsels restraint against over-consumption and hoarding, and so anchors sustainable production and consumption. Seva is selfless service for the welfare of others, and it informs both internal employee relations and external community engagement. Finally, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("the world is one family") widens an organisation's concern beyond shareholders and customers to include communities, ecosystems and future generations.

5.2 IKS-Driven Sustainable Human Capital Practices

These foundational constructs can be turned into specific HR practices. Karma Yoga supports a motivation design built around purpose and mastery instead of reward alone, and it encourages organisations to shape roles around meaningful



contribution. The Triguna framework can inform leadership development that cultivates sattvic qualities, meaning balanced and clear-headed leadership, as a counterweight to a purely rajasic, growth-at-all-costs orientation. The traditional Guru-Shishya (mentor-disciple) relationship is a template for mentoring and knowledge transfer that aims at holistic development and not just narrow skill transmission. The Panchakosha model describes well-being in layers (physical, energetic, mental, intellectual and spiritual), and it supports employee well-being programmes that reach past physical health benefits to psychological and purpose-related needs. Seva-oriented values shape employee relations around mutual care, psychological safety and participation in community-linked corporate social responsibility. Aparigraha, for its part, argues against excessive and environmentally costly perquisites and in favour of reward systems that are proportionate and equitable.

5.3 IKS-Driven Sustainable Consumer Engagement Practices

On the marketing side, Dharma is the ethical basis for truthful, non-manipulative advertising and for transparent claims about a product's sustainability, which speaks directly to concerns about greenwashing. Aparigraha supports messaging and product design that encourage sufficiency, durability and repair over disposability, so that a brand's value is framed around responsible consumption and not around maximising volume. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam supports inclusive, community-first brand positioning. Consumers, local communities and supply-chain partners are treated as an extended family bound by reciprocal obligation, not as targets of extraction. Satya (truthfulness) and the mercantile tradition of reputational trust (Vishwas) shape relationship-marketing approaches that value long-term credibility over short-term persuasion. Seva, lastly, becomes community-embedded engagement, such as participatory local initiatives and grassroots co-creation, in which the brand acts as a service partner to the community and not only as a commercial actor.

5.4 Integrated Layered Structure of the Model

Table 1 sets out how the foundational IKS constructs map onto applications in sustainable HR and sustainable consumer engagement, and shows the parallel structure of the model.

Table 1. Mapping of IKS Constructs to Sustainable HR and Marketing Practices

IKS Construct	Sustainable HR Application	Sustainable Consumer Engagement Application
Dharma (righteous duty)	Ethics-first HR policy design; conduct beyond compliance	Truthful, non-manipulative advertising and claims
Karma Yoga (detached action)	Purpose- and mastery-based motivation design	Purpose-driven brand narratives over hard-sell tactics
Triguna (sattva-rajas-tamas)	Sattvic leadership development programmes	Calm, balanced brand tone vs. aggressive persuasion
Aparigraha (non-accumulation)	Proportionate, equitable reward systems	Sufficiency and durability-focused product messaging
Seva (selfless service)	Employee well-being and CSR participation	Community-embedded, co-created engagement initiatives
Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (world as family)	Inclusive, family-oriented workplace culture	Inclusive branding treating stakeholders as community

This parallel structure suggests that one coherent set of values can inform both the internal (HR) and external (marketing) functions of an organisation. That lowers the risk of a mismatch between how a company treats its employees and how it engages its customers. The strategic sustainability literature describes this internal-external coherence as critical to a credible sustainability position. At the outcome layer, the model proposes that applying these practices together contributes to triple-bottom-line performance (people, planet, profit). It also lines up naturally with several UN Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic



Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). In this way organisational practice is tied to the larger ambitions of Bharat 2047.

6. Discussion: Implications for Bharat 2047

The Dharmic Sustainability Model has several implications for India's path to 2047. First, it suggests that sustainability in Indian organisations does not have to be imported wholesale as a Western corporate social responsibility overlay. It can grow from India's own philosophical resources, which may make sustainability commitments more authentic and longer-lasting among employees and consumers who already know these ideas. Second, because the model links HR and marketing through a shared set of values, it gives organisations a way to reach what could be called "values coherence": one culturally resonant ethical narrative that runs from internal people practices through to external brand engagement. Younger Indian consumers and employees, who look for authenticity, increasingly expect this. Third, at the macro level, wider adoption of business practices informed by Dharma, Seva and Aparigraha could support national priorities such as responsible use of resources, inclusive economic participation and social cohesion, all of which are central to the Viksit Bharat vision. Finally, the model gives Indian business schools and management educators a template, particularly given the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on integrating IKS. They could use it to bring indigenous knowledge into HR and marketing curricula in a rigorous and practice-relevant way, and not as a purely symbolic gesture.

7. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The paper makes three main contributions. On the theoretical side, it connects two strands of IKS-informed management literature that had stayed apart, HRM and marketing, within a single layered conceptual architecture, and so extends earlier work that applied Indian philosophy to one function at a time. It also proposes explicit, falsifiable links between IKS constructs and specific organisational practices. This moves IKS-in-management scholarship away from broad philosophical commentary and toward a level of detail that can be tested empirically. On the practical side, the model gives HR and marketing practitioners in Indian organisations a shared vocabulary and a diagnostic tool. They can use it to audit how culturally authentic and how consistent, inside and out, their sustainability initiatives are. For business educators it offers a framework ready for the classroom, for teaching IKS-integrated management in line with national education policy.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

As a conceptual paper, this work has some important limitations. The framework has not been tested empirically, so the strength of the proposed links between constructs and practices, the conditions under which they hold, and any unintended consequences all remain to be established. Indian Knowledge Systems are internally diverse, and the constructs chosen here are a synthesis, not an exhaustive or uniquely authoritative reading of these traditions. Alternative interpretations and regional or sectarian variations deserve further scholarly attention. There is also a risk that future work should guard against explicitly: IKS terms may be invoked in a superficial or symbolic way, with no real change in organisational practice. This could be called "spiritual washing", by analogy with greenwashing. Future research could take three directions. One is survey-based and case-study validation of the proposed links across different Indian industry sectors. Another is a comparison of how employees and consumers respond to IKS-informed sustainability messaging and to conventional messaging. The third is a longitudinal study of organisations that have deliberately adopted Dharma- or Seva-based management philosophies, to see how their long-run performance and well-being outcomes compare with those of matched conventional organisations.

9. Conclusion

As India nears the centenary of its independence, the search for management models that are globally competitive, ecologically sound and culturally authentic has taken on national importance. This paper has argued that Indian Knowledge Systems provide a coherent but under-used philosophical foundation for sustainable management practice. It has proposed the Dharmic Sustainability Model to link constructs such as Dharma, Karma Yoga, Triguna, Aparigraha, Seva and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to concrete practices in sustainable human capital development and consumer engagement. By setting out a shared set of values across HR and marketing, and by connecting organisational practice



to India's Sustainable Development Goals commitments and the Bharat 2047 vision, the framework gives management scholars a research agenda. It also gives organisations a practical place to start if they want to root their sustainability strategy in indigenous wisdom and not in imported templates alone.

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