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THE PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA: EXPLORING THE PARALLELS WITH MODERN LEGAL SYSTEM

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I. ABSTRACT

The philosophy of Karma is a universal and timeless concept rooted in ancient Indian traditions, indexing the principles of action, intention, and consequence, which lay the foundation for the justice system. This paper examines the philosophy of Karma as a moral framework of action, intention, and consequence, and explores its parallels with the modern legal justice system. The research aims to examine how the Karmic notion of accountability and impartial justice aligns with constitutional principles, including equality before the law, natural justice, and reformatory punishment. Methodologically, the paper adopts a doctrinal approach, relying on primary sources from Vedic literature and judicial decisions, along with secondary commentary from legal scholarship.

*The study finds that while Karma operates as a universal and moral law of causation, its principles are reflected in the corrective, restorative, and retributive functions of modern legal systems. Case law analysis, including *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, *Mohd. Giasuddin v. State of Andhra Pradesh* and *Brown v. Board of Education* demonstrate how courts embody the spirit of karmic justice by ensuring fairness, accountability, and opportunities for redemption. The paper concludes that integrating karmic philosophy into legal discourse can enrich contemporary jurisprudence by aligning law with ethical responsibility and universal values.*

II. KEYWORDS

Karma, Natural Justice, Legal Justice, Reformatory Justice, Modern-Day Legal System

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III. INTRODUCTION

“Karma” is a deeply embedded concept in Indian cultural consciousness spoken in households, philosophies, and moral reflections, yet its essence transcends mere colloquial use. Rooted in the Sanskrit term for “action” or “deed,” Karma represents a comprehensive moral framework where intention, action, and consequence are inextricably linked.²As expounded in Hinduism and further interpreted across Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, the doctrine of Karma posits that past actions shape one’s present experiences, and one’s future is continuously sculpted by present conduct.³

This divine justice mechanism, impartial, timeless, and deeply moral, offers profound conceptual parallels to the modern legal justice system, which also seeks to ensure fairness, accountability, and order through rule-based processes. Both systems recognize the inevitability of consequences, uphold the importance of intentionality, and emphasize the role of correction, not just punishment.⁴ This paper examines the intersections between Karmic philosophy and juridical reasoning, demonstrating how ancient ideals can both enrich and critique contemporary legal thought through case law, constitutional principles, and comparative analysis.⁵

The concept of karma, being a Vedic and historical concept, clearly relevance of this “Divine Justice System” can be traced to the “Modern-Day Legal Justice System”. Both systems serve as mechanisms to maintain order in society, promote conduct, ensure accountability, and uphold fairness. By drawing on the wisdom of the divine system, modern legal systems can further emphasize rehabilitation, moral and ethical responsibility, and justice that transcends mere sanctions. “One can observe and claim up to such extent that legal systems today are related and relevant or merely an

² Wendy Doniger, *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Classics 1991) Introduction, xv–xviii.

³ Wilhelm Halbfass, *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments in Mircea Eliade* (ed), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Vol 8, Macmillan 1987) 263–273.

⁴ N R Madhava Menon, *Criminal Justice Education: A Resource Book* (NLSIU 2004) 94–96.

⁵ Upendra Baxi, ‘Constitutional Justice and the Indian Supreme Court’ in S K Verma and Kusum (eds), *Fifty Years of the Supreme Court of India: Its Grasp and Reach* (Oxford University Press 2000) 136–138.

extension or modernized form of the divine systems that were in existence way before.”

While much of the discourse on Karma has remained within the domains of religion and philosophy, its resonance with legal thought has been underexplored. This paper seeks to bridge that gap by examining Karma not merely as a spiritual doctrine but as a jurisprudential principle that illuminates accountability, liability, and justice in modern law. By placing classical texts such as the *Upanishads*,⁶ *Bhagavad Gita*,⁷ and *Dharmashastra*⁸ alongside judicial precedents from India and comparative jurisdictions, this study positions Karma as both an interpretive lens and a normative guide. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing scholarly efforts to integrate indigenous philosophies into the broader canvas of legal theory and constitutional morality.⁹

*"The law of karma is the law of causation. The law of causation is an eternal principle. You cannot do good without it having its impact on you, nor can you do evil without its recoil."*¹⁰

- Mahatma Gandhi

A. Research Problem

Although Karma has been widely discussed in philosophy and theology, its relevance to legal jurisprudence remains underexplored. The absence of structured comparative analysis between karmic philosophy and modern legal principles leaves a gap in understanding how ancient moral thought can enrich contemporary justice systems.

B. Research Objectives

This paper aims to:

1. Examine the origins and classifications of Karma in Indian philosophical traditions.

⁶ *Upanishads* (trans Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, Vedanta Press 1953).

⁷ *Bhagavad Gita* (trans Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press 2007).

⁸ Wendy Doniger and Brian K Smith (trs), *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin 1991).

⁹ Sadhguru, 'What Is Karma and How Does It Work?' (Isha Foundation)

<https://isha.sadhguru.org/en/wisdom/article/what-is-karma> accessed 26 November 2024.

¹⁰ Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Harper & Row 1950) [PG. 41].

2. Analyze the conceptual intersections between Karma and modern legal doctrines such as liability, natural justice, sanctions, and restorative justice.
3. Evaluate how mythological and cultural interpretations of Karma can serve as analogies for legal reasoning.
4. Demonstrate through case law analysis how courts embody karmic ideals of fairness, accountability, and redemption.

C. Research Questions

1. How does the philosophy of Karma conceptualize justice, accountability, and consequences?
2. In what ways can the principles of Karma be mapped onto modern legal systems?
3. What are the limitations of drawing parallels between a divine justice system and a human-made legal framework?
4. Can the integration of karmic wisdom into legal discourse strengthen contemporary jurisprudence?

D. Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal research methodology. Primary sources such as Vedic texts and constitutional provisions are analyzed alongside judicial decisions from India and comparative jurisdictions. Secondary sources include academic commentary in philosophy, law, and comparative jurisprudence. A critical-analytical approach is employed to evaluate both the intersections and limitations of relating Karma with legal justice.

IV. THE ORIGIN OF KARMA AND TYPES OF KARMA

As discussed in the above introduction, the radical meaning and its origin are in Sanskrit. The first mention of “Karma” could be observed and verified in the “*Rig Veda*”¹¹, one of the four Vedas, which are Hindu scriptures, alongside the *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. The *Rig Veda* translates to “knowledge of the verses”, the oldest Hindu philosophical and religious text collection. According to the ancient

¹¹ *Rig Veda* (c 1500 BCE), Hymns (translation edition recommended).

Vedic texts, the law of Karma was revealed to the Rishis by the gods and was written for the very first time in the *Rig Veda*, around 1500 BCE.¹² However, in the *Rig Veda*, the meaning of the term "Karma" was very limited and could be observed only concerning some ritual action in Hinduism.

However, in the context of the origin of the "Karma philosophy," there is another belief or, to say, understanding of the people in Indian society. The dominant and very first complete understanding of Karma can be rooted in the *Upanishads* (c. 800-300 BCE).¹³ Karma's philosophy gains more philosophical weight when the consequences of actions are attached to it. Thus, karma extends to a moral or ethical dimension.¹⁴ The *Upanishads* teach that every action, intention, and thought has a corresponding consequence. This law of cause and effect, known as Karma, operates as a cosmic force, intricately interwoven with the cycles of birth and rebirth (Samsara). According to the *Upanishads*, the nature of Karma is not just limited to the physical realm but extends to the realm of consciousness and the soul. Thus, one's actions and intentions influence their present life and shape their future incarnations.¹⁵

In the ancient Vedic texts of Hinduism, primarily, there is mention of 4 types of "Karma" which are Sanchita, Prarabdha, Kriyamana, and Agami karma.

A. Sanchita Karma

The past lives' records of karma, or to be said, the vault of your karma over many lifetimes. This is the accumulated karma from all past lives, stored in the subconscious mind. If you close your eyes, become aware enough, and look into yourself, you will know the nature of the universe, not because you are looking at it through your head, but simply because this information is present in the making of the body.¹⁶ It is the total potential karma that an individual has accumulated over countless lifetimes in this universe.

¹² Ralph TH Griffith (tr), *The Hymns of the Rigveda* (EJ Lazarus & Co 1896).

¹³ Patrick Olivelle (tr), *The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation* (OUP 1998).

¹⁴ Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol I* (CUP 1922).

¹⁵ Patrick Olivelle (tr), *The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation* (OUP 1998).

¹⁶ Sadhguru, 'What Is Karma and How Does It Work?' (Isha Foundation)

<https://isha.sadhguru.org/en/wisdom/article/what-is-karma> accessed 26 November 2024.

B. Prarabdha Karma

This is a very small and specific portion of Sanchita's karma that is currently being experienced in this lifetime. It is the karma that has ripened and is being played out in the present moment. Prarabdha karma is a certain amount of information allotted for this life. Depending upon the vibrancy of your life, life allocates for itself how much information it can take on. The creation is very compassionate. If it gives you the whole lot of karma that you have, you will be dead. Right now, many people are tortured by the simple memories from the 30-40 years of their lifetime. If they are given a hundred times that memory, they would not survive it. Nature allots Prarabdha, an allotted memory that you can handle.¹⁷

C. Kriyamana Karma

This is the karma created in the present moment through one's thoughts, words, and actions. It is the karma that accumulates and adds to one's Sanchita karma. Kriyamana karma, in particular, is that which is being created in the present lifetime. It is essentially the concept that is commonly associated with the term 'Karma' in Western culture.¹⁸

D. Agami Karma

This is the form of karma that is yet to come, the future consequences of one's present actions. It is the karma that will unfold in future lives, based on the Kriyamana karma accumulated in this lifetime. More precisely, Agami karma focuses on the karma that is generated by an individual's current actions and choices he/she make in specific situations, which will affect their future experiences and circumstances. This concept highlights the importance of present-day-to-day actions in shaping one's destiny.

Further considering in terms of nature, "Karma" can also be classified based on the moral, ethical, and spiritual nature of actions as Satvik, Rajasik, and Tamasik Karma.

¹⁷ Sadhguru, 'What Is Karma and How Does It Work?' (Isha Foundation)

<https://isha.sadhguru.org/en/wisdom/article/what-is-karma> accessed 26 November 2024.

¹⁸ 'Kriyamana Karma' (Yogapedia) <<https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/8477/kriyamana-karma>> accessed 05 December 2024.

E. Satvik Karma: The Purest Form of Karma

The concept of Satvik Karma represents the purest form of action as described in Hindu philosophy. Rooted in the *gunas* (qualities) of nature, *Satva* embodies goodness, purity, clarity, and moral intent. In the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Adhyay 18, Shloka 23, such action is defined as one that is ordained by scriptures, performed without egoism, and executed without attachment to results or aversion to outcomes, undertaken solely as a matter of duty.¹⁹ This form of karma is free from selfish desire and personal gain; it is carried out in alignment with dharma (righteousness) and reflects the highest ethical standard. In the broader karmic framework, Satvik Karma leads to liberation (*moksha*), mirroring the ideal of moral neutrality and spiritual clarity that resonates with the aims of restorative justice in modern jurisprudence.

Doing Satvik Karma throughout life means leading a path that will reward Liberation (*moksha*) in the Divine Justice system, a foremost outcome one could attain. Similarly, in the context of the Modern legal system, Satvik Karma could be termed to be morally, ethically, and legally right doings by an individual, which is done towards society as charity or something for public welfare and humanity.

F. Rajasik Karma: The Passionate Karma

Rajasik Karma refers to action motivated by self-interest, desire, and attachment. Unlike *Satvik Karma*, which is performed selflessly and without craving for outcomes, *Rajasik Karma* is executed with a deep attachment to results and driven by egoistic ambition or personal gratification. In the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Adhyaya 18, Shloka 24, such karma is described as that which is performed with great effort, motivated by selfish desires, and undertaken by individuals with a strong sense of doership and expectation of rewards.²⁰

This type of action, while not necessarily unlawful, reflects a morally diluted intention and often leads to entanglement in the cycle of consequences, reinforcing karmic bondage (*samsara*) rather than spiritual progress. In modern legal-ethical terms, *Rajasik*

¹⁹ Eknath Easwaran (tr), *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd edn, Nilgiri Press 2007) ch 18, shloka 23.

²⁰ Eknath Easwaran (tr), *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd edn, Nilgiri Press 2007) ch 18, shloka 24.

Karma corresponds to acts that, while legally permissible, lack ethical depth or public-spirited motivation.

Doing Rajasik Karma throughout life means you will be rewarded with Reincarnation (Punarjanma), either in better or worse life circumstances. In comparison with modern legal terms, this is not legally wrong but could be ethically wrong, as this is a path full of selfish desires of one, leading to not considering ethics.

G. Tamasik Karma: The Impure Karma

Tamasik Karma is considered the most impure and destructive form of action in the karmic hierarchy. It is driven by ignorance, delusion, apathy, or malice, and is often carried out without awareness of consequences, ethical responsibility, or consideration for harm caused to others. In the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Adhyay 18, Shloka 25*, such karma is described as action undertaken out of delusion, done without discernment, disregarding personal loss, harm to others, or the actor's capacity or duty.²¹

This form of action stems from a darkness of understanding and results in negative karmic accumulation, reinforcing cycles of suffering and spiritual regression. Legally, *Tamasik Karma* aligns with acts of gross negligence, recklessness, or malicious intent, the kind of conduct that modern judicial systems punish through sanctions, reflecting the karmic principle of inevitable consequences for wrongful acts.

Doing Tamasik Karma throughout life will lead you to be rewarded with Hell (narak), where the departed soul suffers punishment for their wrongdoings in that particular lifetime. In modern-day legal interpretation, it could be traced to Civil and Criminal wrongs done by an individual, which is followed by sanctions to that person by the Judiciary for that particular wrong. These acts are morally, ethically, and also legally wrong.

*These classifications demonstrate not only a spiritual taxonomy but also a normative logic parallel to jurisprudence.*²² *The movement from accumulated to active Karma mirrors the legal*

²¹ Eknath Easwaran (tr), *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd edn, Nilgiri Press 2007) ch 18, shloka 25.

²² Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy* (Vol. I, Oxford University Press 1923).

*system's concern with records, present actions, and future consequences. The gradation of Karma into Satvik, Rajasik, and Tamasik provides a moral framework comparable to distinctions between lawful conduct, ethically questionable acts, and punishable wrongs.*²³

*By situating Karma within such a structured framework, Indian philosophy anticipates modern legal doctrines of causation, liability, and accountability.*²⁴ *Both systems, though operating in different normative registers, share the conviction that actions are never without consequence.*

V. MYTHOLOGICAL INSTANCES AND INTERSECTIONS

The Justice system of the Supreme Being (The God), with the values of equality, righteousness, fairness, accountability, restoration, etc. These values show the aim of this justice system, which is to rectify the wrongs and bring real human values. God's justice is disciplinary; it is never in the way of prejudiced, arbitrary, or spontaneous, mainly based on morality. In the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Sri Vasudev Krishna teaches equality and justice towards all living beings. Further explains that everyone faces the consequences according to their "Karma."

No one in this universe can escape the consequences of their Karma over many lifetimes. Even the Supreme being, Sri Vasudev Krishna, the god himself, cannot escape his Karma; the philosophy of "Karma: the divine justice" system applies to him also. Narrating the death of Sri Vasudev Krishna, which is based on the Karma justice system, Sri Krishna, the avatar of Maha Vishnu, died from the arrow of a mere hunter, "Jara". Gandhari's curse had acted and achieved its purpose, just like the Lord himself had promised her.

It is believed that the hunter who was responsible for the death of Krishna was none other than Bali, King of Kishkindha, in his last birth. Maha Vishnu, in his previous avatar as Sri Ram, had killed Bali from a hidden spot atop a tree. Bali had committed no act against Sri Ram, and hence Ram had no reason whatsoever to kill him. This story beautifully brings out the very important fact that even the Ruler of the Universe

²³ Dasgupta, Surendranath, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Vol. I, Cambridge University Press 1922).

²⁴ Zaehner, R.C., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford University Press 1969).

(Supreme lord) is under and must follow the laws of Karma, which are applied.²⁵ This incident most significantly shows relevance to the Modern-Day Legal System, a clear idea of the “Rule of law” where a state must be governed according to the law with no arbitrary rule of any monarch, and “Supremacy of law” where no individual or organization is above the law and everybody is equal in the eyes of the law.

This lays down the foundation for the principle of “Equality Before the Law” in the Modern legal system, which can be traced in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948”²⁶. The document explicitly states that "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law". Furthermore, Article 14 of the Indian Constitution²⁷, a fundamental right that is given to citizens as well as non-citizens, states that all people should be treated equally in the eyes of the law, implying that no one should have any privilege over another.

As Indians, we all must have heard about Yamraj, the God of death and justice. The Yamraj Justice system refers to the concept of justice and moral evaluation. Yamraj plays a central role in Hinduism as the judge of souls after death, as he is also considered the “Dharmaraj”, the king of dharma, responsible for upholding the cosmic order by rewarding morality and punishing immorality. According to Hindu beliefs, the body can be destroyed, but the soul cannot be destroyed by any means.

After death, the soul departs from the body and heads towards Yamraj’s court in the Yamlok (realm of Yamraj). At the court of Yamraj, he is assisted by Chitragupta, a divine record keeper who keeps a diligent record of every action, either be good or bad, performed by an individual in his lifetime on earth. This is to be presented at Yamraj’s court like a Chargesheet is filed and presented in the Modern-day legal justice system. This arrangement is much the same as the Judicial Court system we follow in the Modern-day Legal Justice system, with “judges and court reporters”.

²⁵ ‘The death of Krishna’ (kshetrapuranas)

<<https://kshetrapuranas.wordpress.com/2009/02/19/the-death-of-krishna-adapted-from-the-mahabharatha/#:~:text=P.S.,Vaali%20in%20his%20last%20birth>> accessed 09 December 2024

²⁶ UN General Assembly, ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (adopted 10 December 1948) UNGA Res 217 (III) A, UN Doc A/RES/217(III).

²⁷ Constitution of India 1950, art 14.

Afterward, the departed soul is presented in front of Yamraj's court, their Yamraj evaluates the deeds (karma) of the departed soul according to the diligently maintained records. The judgment of Yamraj is based on the law of "Karma"; souls are rewarded for "Punya" and punished for "Paap". The outcomes can be reincarnation into better or worse life circumstances, liberation (moksha), or punishment in hell. Yamraj's justice system most prominently emphasizes accountability for one's actions and leading a righteous life, and sets up standards of morality, encouraging people to lead a life according to Dharma and avoid harming others.

Scholars such as P.V. Kane²⁸ and Robert Lingat²⁹ have noted that dharmic literature, including the *Dharmashastras*, integrated these mythological constructs into normative legal thought, embedding them in rules of conduct and social regulation. Wendy Doniger³⁰ likewise emphasizes how such narratives are best understood as symbolic representations of justice rather than dogmatic accounts of divine will. Thus, mythological texts like the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* operate as cultural jurisprudence: they do not prescribe enforceable law but embody ideals of fairness, equality, and accountability that anticipate the logic of modern legal systems.

VI. THE ESSENCE OF KARMA IN MODERN-DAY LEGAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In modern times, the philosophy of "Karma" can be marked and reinterpreted in various modern-day contexts and systems, and the justice system is a great exemplification of that. A clear essence of "Karma" can be emphasized in the modern-day legal justice system, while it cannot be stated to be a complete correspondence of this justice system, but it constitutes very similar principles of justice, fairness, morality, responsibility, and accountability. In one of the various contexts of modern society, the concept of "Natural Justice" can be closely linked to the philosophy of

²⁸ PV Kane, *History of Dharmashastra* (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1930-1962).

²⁹ Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (Oxford University Press 1973).

³⁰ Wendy Doniger and Brian K Smith (trs), *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Classics 1991) 112.

“Karma”, both concepts signify that action either with Bona fied intention or with Mala fied intention will lead to the consequences accordingly.

The Perceptions of Karma in Modern-day Justice, having mutuals in Divine and Modern-Day Legal Justice:

A. The Impartial and Universal System

The Divine Justice system of karma is believed to be impartial and universal, with applicability to all life forms. Every form of life in existence has to face its karma with no escape from this, without any consideration of its cultural, social, and temporal boundaries. The Modern-day Justice system, Black letter laws, and Judicial minds aim to uphold impartiality through the “Rule of Law”. Justice systems attempt to apply laws uniformly, regardless of a person's societal status and any other kind of privilege. The mechanisms, like due process of law and equality before the law, ensure its applicability and integrity.

In the Landmark judgment of *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 1963 U.S. Supreme Court,³¹ The Supreme Court ruled that the Sixth Amendment's right to counsel is a fundamental right to a fair trial, ensuring justice and accountability in criminal matters. The case highlights the principle of accountability in ensuring everyone receives fair treatment and no discrimination is practiced, similar to the impartial nature of Karma, where the individual faces consequences based on their own performed action.

In the Landmark judgement of *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, U.S. Supreme Court,³² The Court declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional as it violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The case resonates with the idea of impartiality and fairness in Karma, where no one is exempt from accountability or justice based on any privilege or status.

This judgment marked not just the end of legally sanctioned segregation but the moral awakening of American constitutional jurisprudence, compelling the judiciary to evolve from a passive interpreter of law to a proactive guarantor of substantive

³¹ *Gideon v. Wainwright*, 372 U.S. 335 (1963).

³² *Brown v. Board of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

equality. In declaring that “separate is inherently unequal,” the Court aligned itself with the karmic principle of impartiality, recognizing that systemic wrongs demand affirmative correction, not just procedural neutrality. As legal philosopher Owen Fiss argues, courts must act as agents of moral reasoning, not merely as custodians of textual fidelity.³³ The decision illustrates how constitutional law, like Karma, must look beyond appearances and evaluate real-world impact, remedying structural disadvantages and restoring equilibrium. In both frameworks, injustice cannot be neutralized by formal equality; it must be actively confronted through transformative intervention.

This landmark judgment not only ended formal segregation but also established the jurisprudential foundation for substantive equality, recognizing that justice requires more than identical treatment; it requires corrective action to dismantle structural discrimination. As legal scholar Owen Fiss insightfully observes, the role of courts in such constitutional moments is to act as “instruments of social transformation,” capable of interpreting equality in a dynamic and morally responsive manner.³⁴

In this context, the ruling mirrors the karmic ideal of universal justice, where the individual's inherent worth, not their external identity, determines the moral and social consequences of their actions. Just as Karma does not distinguish based on race, caste, or status but purely on one's conduct, so too did the Court reject entrenched systems of privilege, reaffirming that law must align with moral fairness and ethical neutrality to preserve the legitimacy of justice in society.

B. Liability and Responsibility: Morality vs Legality

Finding the relevance of “Liability and Responsibility” dealing with Morality vs Legality in the divine justice system and the modern-day justice system is mainly established on its understanding and application. “Liability” refers to the legal responsibility of a person or entity to answer for their actions or omissions, often resulting in an obligation to compensate for harm or fulfill a duty they abided by, and “Responsibility” refers to something that is your job or duty to deal with. In the divine

³³ Owen Fiss, *Groups and the Equal Protection Clause* (1976) 5 *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 107.

³⁴ Owen Fiss, *Groups and the Equal Protection Clause* (1976) 5 *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 107.

justice system of “Karma,” it is as if a person does good and acts according to moral values, it may bring about fruitful and favorable outcomes on the second side if a person does bad and doesn’t act according to moral values may bring in unfavorable outcomes and negative consequences. In the particular aspect of Justice, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* conveys the message of Equality, Liberty, Fraternity, and Freedom. There is Justice for all living beings with the infallible law of karma. For every action we take, we will face a reaction.³⁵ This is pretty similar to what we have in the modern justice system prevailing today. If a law is being violated, sanctions will take place, and following and maintaining the law will prevent you from facing sanctions.

The principle of “Karma” and the legal doctrine of “Liability” both highlight the importance one must be of knowing his/actions and the potential outcome of those very actions. While the law of “Karma” extends to all the outcomes of individual action, including negligent action in the case of the legal doctrine of “Liability” is a narrow concept mainly focusing on only the foreseeable harms through one’s action.

C. The Idea of Sanctions: Corrective Mechanism

The idea of the Sanctions could be simply understood as penalties or other means of enforcement used to provide incentives for obedience to the law or other rules and regulations.³⁶ This is a corrective mechanism, which could be observed in both the Divine system of Karma and Modern-day justice. In the aspect of the Divine system, individuals suffer or benefit according to their records. In Hinduism, Dharmaraj ‘Yamraj’ is believed to be the God of Justice and death. He is the Chief Justice in one of the 21 universes of Brahm Kal, who keeps account of all deeds of every creature. he is responsible for the execution of law and reward, and punishment.³⁷ Getting relevance with Modern-day justice, the concept of sanctions is followed; if a law is violated by an individual, he will face sanctions based on his

³⁵ Raj Patel, ‘Dharma and Justice: A Correspondence’ 2024 (IJLMH) <<https://doi.org/10.10000/IJLMH.118684>> accessed 12 December 2024.

³⁶ Black, ‘Henry Campbell (1990)’ (Black’s Law Dictionary 6th ed. St. Paul, MN.) <West Publishing> accessed 12 December 2024.

³⁷ Raj Patel, ‘Dharma and Justice: A Correspondence’ 2024 (IJLMH) <<https://doi.org/10.10000/IJLMH.118684>> accessed 12 December 2024.

action and the outcome of that action. Grievous crime leads to serious punishments or sanctions such as capital punishment, rigorous imprisonment, or severe fines.

In the Landmark judgment of *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, 1997*, the Supreme Court of India,³⁸ Supreme Court of India laid down the Vishaka Guidelines, establishing rules for preventing sexual harassment against women in the workplace. These guidelines were later codified into law, "The POSH Act, 2013."³⁹ This shows how modern sanctions ensure accountability and uphold fairness, aligning with the corrective nature of the Divine justice system, which could be traced in the Modern Legal Systems.

This judicial intervention reflects a paradigm where the Indian judiciary evolves beyond a mere interpreter of codified statutes to an active architect of social justice, embodying the role of a moral guardian in constitutional governance. In *Vishaka*, the Court acted not in the absence of law, but in anticipation of it, invoking Article 14⁴⁰ And international human rights principles to fill the legislative vacuum. This bold step signifies the modern judiciary's recognition that justice must be both timely and transformative, especially in matters involving dignity and equality. Much like the corrective energy of Karma, which does not wait for ritual formalities to reward or punish, the Court acted preemptively to protect the rights of women, enforcing accountability in workplaces through legally binding guidelines.⁴¹ This illustrates how constitutional morality, as shaped by judicial reasoning, often rises to address ethical failures in society, thereby reinforcing the view that modern law, when imbued with moral consciousness, becomes a functional extension of the karmic justice ideal.⁴²

D. The Redemption and Rehabilitation: Restorative and Retributive Justice

Different people with different understandings and different institutions with different observations and interpretations, but the question still stands- "Why has

³⁸ *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, A.I.R. 1997 S.C. 3011 (India).

³⁹ Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013, No. 14 of 2013, India Code.

⁴⁰ Constitution of India, art 141.

⁴¹ Upendra Baxi, 'The "Just Justice" of *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan*' (1999) 2 SCC (Jour) 1.

⁴² Gautam Bhatia, *The Transformative Constitution: A Radical Biography in Nine Acts* (HarperCollins India, 2019).

there been a need for a Justice system, prolonged?" The main idea behind a Justice system, whether it is the Divine Justice system or the Modern-day Justice system, is "Redemption and Rehabilitation". The Justice systems over the long term have been formed to emphasize the importance of giving individuals an opportunity to atone for their wrongdoings and to reintegrate into society as a responsible and reformed individual. This Restorative and Retributive feature of the Justice system aligns it with the standards and values of Morality and Legality.

In the Landmark judgment of *Mohd. Giasuddin v. State of Andhra Pradesh, 1977, Supreme Court of India*,⁴³ Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer observed that justice should focus on reformation and rehabilitation rather than mere retribution, especially for offenders who convey the potential for change and reform themselves. This observation reflects the restorative aspect of Karma, which allows individuals to correct their wrongdoings and achieve balance in their actions through moral actions.

This progressive outlook marks a decisive shift from colonial retributivism to a value-based jurisprudence, where the legal system seeks not only to punish but to restore the individual to a morally conscious life. As Prof. N. R. Madhava Menon has rightly argued, the criminal justice system must embrace a "therapeutic and restorative model" that views offenders as reformable participants in social justice, not as permanent outcasts.⁴⁴ This jurisprudential turn parallels the karmic doctrine, where consequences are not merely backward-looking but are also forward-resolving, aiming for the restoration of dharma (cosmic order). It brings to the fore a justice model that internalizes the ethics of Karma that wrongdoings must lead to responsibility, but also to the chance for correction, redemption, and ultimately, reintegration into the moral fold of society.

⁴³ Mohd. Giasuddin v. State of Andhra Pradesh, (1977) 3 S.C.C. 287 (India).

⁴⁴ N. R. Madhava Menon, *Criminal Justice Education: A Resource Book* (National Law School of India University, 2004) 112.

VII. CONCLUSION

The philosophy of Karma, originating in ancient Indian thought, offers a sophisticated framework for understanding accountability, causation, and justice.⁴⁵ This paper has demonstrated that the essential features of Karma, its impartiality, inevitability of consequences, and emphasis on both retribution and reform, find parallels within modern legal systems. Judicial decisions, ranging from *Brown v Board of Education*⁴⁶ In the United States, in *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan*⁴⁷ And *Mohd. Giasuddin v State of Andhra Pradesh*⁴⁸ In India, illustrate how courts embody values resonant with karmic jurisprudence: fairness, equality, corrective sanctions, and the possibility of redemption.

At the same time, important distinctions must be recognised. Karma operates as a metaphysical and universal law,⁴⁹ whereas legal systems are human-made, contextual, and constrained by procedural safeguards. Overreliance on karmic determinism risks undermining individual agency and equality,⁵⁰ and therefore, any comparative framework must remain analogical rather than literal. Law must be grounded in constitutional morality and rights-based protections,⁵¹ which cannot be substituted by spiritual philosophies.

Nevertheless, the study of Karma provides valuable insights into how legal systems may deepen their commitment to justice. It encourages us to view law not merely as a coercive instrument, but as an ethical enterprise aligned with responsibility and fairness.⁵² The analogy between Karma and legal justice underscores the importance

⁴⁵ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Vol I* (OUP 1923); Patrick Olivelle (tr), *The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation* (OUP 1998); RC Zaehner (tr), *The Bhagavad Gita* (OUP 1969).

⁴⁶ *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* 347 US 483 (1954).

⁴⁷ *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan* AIR 1997 SC 3011.

⁴⁸ *Mohd. Giasuddin v State of Andhra Pradesh* (1977) 3 SCC 287.

⁴⁹ Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol I* (CUP 1922).

⁵⁰ PV Kane, *History of Dharmashastra*, vol II (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute 1941).

⁵¹ *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala* (1973) 4 SCC 225; *Indira Nehru Gandhi v Raj Narain* 1975 Supp SCC 1; Constitution of India 1950, art 14; Julius J Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Routledge 1994).

⁵² HLA Hart, *The Concept of Law* (2nd edn, Clarendon Press 1994); Lon L Fuller, *The Morality of Law* (Yale University Press 1964).

of ensuring that sanctions are not arbitrary but corrective.⁵³ That liability is coupled with accountability,⁵⁴ And that opportunities for redemption remain integral to the justice process.⁵⁵

Further inquiry may explore how karmic philosophy could enrich specific areas of law, such as environmental justice, restorative justice in criminal law, and transitional justice mechanisms in post-conflict societies.⁵⁶ Comparative research with other philosophical traditions, such as Aristotle's virtue ethics⁵⁷ or Rawls' theory of justice,⁵⁸ It may also provide fruitful avenues for interdisciplinary scholarship.

By recognising both the parallels and the limits of the karmic analogy, legal scholarship can appreciate the enduring relevance of ancient philosophy in framing modern discourses on justice.⁵⁹ Without compromising on constitutional and democratic commitments.

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⁵³ *Nilabati Behera v State of Orissa* (1993) 2 SCC 746; Wendy Doniger and Brian K Smith (trs), *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin 1991).

⁵⁴ *M.C. Mehta v Union of India* (1987) 1 SCC 395.

⁵⁵ *Sunil Batra v Delhi Administration* (1978) 4 SCC 494; *Roper v Simmons* 543 US 551 (2005); NR Madhava Menon, *Criminal Justice: A Human Rights Perspective of the Criminal Justice Process in India* (Allied Publishers 2004).

⁵⁶ Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India* (OUP 1973).

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Terence Irwin tr, Hackett 1999).

⁵⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press 1971).

⁵⁹ PV Kane (n 6); Julius J Lipner (n 7).

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