

Arabic Ethics (Akhlāq) and Sanskrit Dharmashastra: Moral Philosophy in the IKS Curriculum

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Abstract:

This paper undertakes a systematic comparative study of Arabic ethics (Akhlāq) as articulated in the classical Islamic philosophical tradition and Sanskrit Dharmashastra as codified in the Hindu legal and moral tradition of India. Both traditions represent mature, sophisticated, and internally coherent systems of moral philosophy developed over centuries through rigorous intellectual labor. While they emerge from distinct metaphysical foundations — Islamic ethics grounded in divine command, prophetic example (Sunnah), and rational philosophy (falsafa), and Dharmashastra rooted in Vedic revelation (shruti), cosmological order (rta), and caste-contextual duty (varnashrama dharma) — the paper demonstrates that they share a remarkable convergence of core moral concerns, virtues, and practical ethical principles.

The study proceeds through five analytical axes: the metaphysical grounding of ethics in each tradition; the theory of virtues (fadhail / gunas); the concept of duty and obligation (fard/ dharma); the role of intention in moral evaluation (niyyah / bhava); and the treatment of justice (adl / nyaya). The paper then situates its findings within the framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India and the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) initiative, arguing that a comparative curriculum incorporating both Akhlāq and Dharmashastra can contribute substantially to NEP's goals of value education, ethical citizenship, and civilizational self-awareness. The paper concludes with concrete recommendations for curricular integration at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, presenting Akhlāq-Dharmashastra comparative philosophy as a model for how India's plural intellectual heritage can be leveraged for contemporary moral education.

Keywords: Akhlāq, Dharmashastra, Islamic ethics, Hindu moral philosophy, Indian Knowledge System (IKS).

1. INTRODUCTION

Moral philosophy stands at the heart of every civilization's self-understanding. How a civilization answers the questions — What is the good life? What constitutes right action? What virtues should a human being cultivate? What duties bind individuals to their communities and to the cosmos? — reveals its deepest values, its conception of human nature, and its vision of social order. Two of the world's great civilizations — the Arabic-Islamic and the Sanskrit-Indic — have each developed rich, sophisticated, and enduring answers to these questions. These answers, though shaped by different metaphysical premises and

expressed in different languages and literary forms, address fundamentally the same moral concerns and, as this paper will demonstrate, often arrive at strikingly similar conclusions.

Arabic ethics, known in the Islamic philosophical tradition as *Ilm al-Akhlaq* (the science of character traits), developed over a millennium through the synthesis of Quranic moral teaching, Prophetic example (Sunnah), and the rich philosophical inheritance of Greek ethics (especially Aristotle's virtue ethics as mediated through Arabic translations). The tradition produced major works such as Miskawayh's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* (Refinement of Character), Al-Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences), Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's *Akhlaq-i-Nasiri* (Nasirean Ethics), and many others — forming a coherent body of moral philosophy that has shaped the ethical sensibilities of Muslim communities across the world, including in India, for over a thousand years.

Sanskrit Dharmashastra — the body of literature dealing with dharma (righteous law, duty, and moral order) — is one of the oldest and most voluminous traditions of jurisprudence and moral philosophy in the world. It encompasses texts from the ancient Dharmasutras (c. 600-200 BCE) through the great medieval digests (nibandhas) and commentaries, including the Manusmriti, Yajnavalkya Smriti, Arthashastra of Kautilya, and the Mahabharata's Shanti Parva — all of which wrestle with the question of dharma at individual, social, and cosmic levels.

These two traditions met on Indian soil during the medieval period, when the arrival of Islam and the development of a composite Indo-Islamic culture created both intellectual confrontation and creative synthesis. Sufi saints, Mughal emperors, and court scholars navigated between these two moral worlds, and their navigations left traces in the syncretic moral culture of medieval India — a culture that NEP 2020 rightly identifies as part of India's living intellectual heritage.

This paper argues that a comparative study of *Akhlaq* and Dharmashastra is not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for contemporary India's moral education. NEP 2020 explicitly calls for the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into higher education, with value education identified as a priority. This paper demonstrates that IKS, properly conceived, encompasses both the Sanskrit-Vedic and the Arabic-Islamic moral traditions as twin streams of India's ethical heritage, and that their comparison and integration can produce a richer, more inclusive, and more practically effective moral curriculum than either tradition can provide alone.

2. CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW: AKHLAQ AND DHARMASHASTRA

2.1 Arabic Akhlaq: Foundations and Key Texts

The Arabic word *Akhlaq* (singular: *Khuluq*) literally means natural dispositions, character traits, or innate temperament — from the same trilateral root KH-L-Q as *khalq* (creation) and *khilqa* (natural constitution). The Quran itself uses the term in a pivotal verse referring to the Prophet Muhammad: *Wa innaka la-ala khuluqin adheem* — Verily, you are of a magnificent character (Quran 68:4). This verse established the Prophet's exemplary character as the supreme moral model and laid the foundation for the science of *Akhlaq* as the systematic cultivation of excellent character traits in imitation of the Prophetic example (Sunnah).

The *Akhlaq* tradition draws from three major intellectual sources. The first is the Quranic moral framework, which establishes God (Allah) as the ultimate source of moral law, identifies specific virtues and vices through direct prescription and narrative example, and frames human moral life within the

context of divine accountability (akhira — the afterlife). The second source is the Hadith literature — the recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet — which provides enormously detailed practical moral guidance covering every aspect of personal and social life. The third source is the Greek philosophical tradition, particularly Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Plato's Republic, which were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid period and synthesized with Islamic moral teaching by philosophers such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Miskawayh.

Key texts of the Akhlaq tradition include Miskawayh's Tahdhib al-Akhlaq (10th century CE), which closely follows Aristotelian virtue ethics within an Islamic framework; Al-Ghazali's Ihya Ulum al-Din (11th century CE), which integrates Sufi spirituality with practical moral psychology; Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's Akhlaq-i-Nasiri (13th century CE), written in Persian and widely influential in India; and Jalal al-Din al-Dawwani's Akhlaq-i-Jalali (15th century CE), which became a standard text in the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum taught in Indian madrasas. The Akhlaq tradition thus has a direct and continuous presence in Indian intellectual life stretching over seven centuries.

2.2 Sanskrit Dharmashastra: Foundations and Key Texts

The Sanskrit term Dharmashastra (धर्मशास्त्र) refers to the body of authoritative texts (shastra) dealing with dharma — a concept of extraordinary richness and complexity that encompasses cosmic order, natural law, righteous conduct, social duty, religious obligation, and moral virtue. The root dhr (to hold, to support, to sustain) gives dharma its foundational meaning: that which holds the world together, that which sustains the cosmic and social order. Dharmashastra is thus not merely a legal code but a comprehensive vision of the good life embedded in a cosmic framework.

The Dharmashastra tradition is one of the oldest continuous bodies of jurisprudential and moral literature in the world, stretching from the Dharmasutras of the Vedic period (c. 600-200 BCE) through the Smritis of the early classical period (c. 200 BCE - 500 CE) and the great medieval digests (nibandhas) up to the 18th century. Key texts include the Manusmriti (c. 200 BCE - 200 CE), the most widely known and influential of the Smritis, which provides comprehensive coverage of dharma at every level from cosmic law to daily personal conduct; the Yajnavalkya Smriti (c. 300-500 CE), regarded by many commentators as more systematic than Manu; the Arthashastra of Kautilya (c. 4th century BCE - 3rd century CE), which addresses the dharma of statecraft; and the philosophical elaborations of dharma in the Mahabharata's Shanti Parva and the Bhagavad Gita, which provide the most profound philosophical treatments of the concept.

Dharmashastra is notable for its contextual approach to ethics: rather than prescribing a single universal moral code applicable to all persons in all circumstances, it recognizes that dharma is sanatana (eternal) in its ultimate principles but visesha (particular) in its applications, varying according to one's varna (social class), ashrama (stage of life), desa (place), kala (time), and individual constitution (svabhava). This contextual relativism is a sophisticated feature of Dharmashastra that distinguishes it sharply from most Western and Arabic ethical traditions, which tend toward more universalist prescriptions.

3. METAPHYSICAL GROUNDING OF ETHICS

3.1 Divine Command and Natural Law in Akhlaq

Islamic ethics is theocentric at its foundation: God (Allah) is the supreme legislator and the ultimate source of all moral value. The Quran establishes divine commands (amr) and prohibitions (nahy) as the primary

basis of the moral law (shariah), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) has developed an elaborate science of extracting moral and legal norms from the primary sources of the Quran and Sunnah. In this framework, an action is obligatory (fard/wajib), recommended (mustahabb), neutral (mubah), discouraged (makruh), or forbidden (haram) based on its conformity with divine command.

However, the Akhlaq tradition — especially in its philosophical branch — does not rest ethics on divine command alone. Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Miskawayh, and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) all drew on the Aristotelian natural law tradition to argue that moral virtue can be known through reason, independently of revelation, because the cosmos itself reflects a rational moral order established by God. This rationalist strand of Islamic ethics holds that reason (aql) is itself a faculty for moral knowledge, and that the virtues prescribed by the Quran are also discoverable by rational reflection on human nature and its highest flourishing (sa'ada — happiness or felicity, the Islamic equivalent of Aristotle's eudaimonia).

3.2 Cosmic Order (Rta) and Dharmic Ethics in Dharmashastra

The metaphysical grounding of Dharmashastra is in the Vedic concept of rta — the cosmic order or truth that pervades the universe and governs all natural and moral phenomena. Rta is the principle by which the sun rises, the seasons turn, and the moral life of human beings is ordered. Dharma, in its original Vedic usage, is the human participation in and expression of rta — the set of actions, observances, and ways of living that conform to and sustain the cosmic order. This gives Dharmashastra its characteristic sense that moral duties are not arbitrary social conventions but expressions of a cosmic law as real and binding as the laws of nature.

In later Dharmashastra, this cosmic grounding was elaborated through the concepts of karma (the moral law of cause and effect), samsara (the cycle of rebirth), and moksha (liberation from the cycle) — a metaphysical framework that gives moral action a significance extending beyond a single lifetime. Just as Islamic ethics situates moral action within the framework of divine accountability in the afterlife (akhira), Dharmashastra situates moral action within the framework of karmic consequence across multiple lives. Both frameworks agree that moral action has consequences that outlast the present moment and that transcend purely worldly calculation.

3.3 Convergences and Divergences

The most significant convergence between the two metaphysical frameworks is that both locate the ultimate ground of ethics outside the arbitrary will of individual human beings, in a transpersonal moral order — whether divine command (Akhlaq) or cosmic law (Dharmashastra). Both traditions therefore share a strong sense that moral norms are objective and binding, not merely subjective preferences or social conventions. Both also agree that moral development requires cultivation over time, that virtue is not innate but acquired through practice, and that the morally excellent person achieves a kind of harmony between reason, desire, and action that constitutes a form of human flourishing.

The most significant divergence is in the relationship between the universal and the particular in moral prescription. Islamic ethics, especially in its juridical form, tends toward universal commands binding on all Muslims equally — the five pillars, the prohibitions of usury and alcohol, the rules of inheritance — regardless of social position, stage of life, or personal constitution. Dharmashastra, by contrast, explicitly codes different dharmic obligations for different varnas and ashramas: what is dharma for a Brahmin is different from what is dharma for a Kshatriya; what is dharma for a householder is different from what is

dharma for a renunciant. This contextual particularism of Dharmashastra contrasts sharply with the universalist thrust of Islamic ethics, and the tension between these two approaches provides one of the most productive areas for comparative philosophical inquiry.

4. VIRTUE ETHICS: FADHAIL AND GUNAS

4.1 The Virtues in the Akhlaq Tradition

The heart of Akhlaq as a practical moral philosophy is the doctrine of virtues (fadhail, singular fadila). Following Aristotle's influence, the Akhlaq tradition conceives virtue (fadila) as the mean (wasat) between two extremes of excess and deficiency. Miskawayh identifies four cardinal virtues: Hikma (wisdom), Shaja'a (courage), Iffah (temperance/chastity), and Adl (justice) — corresponding closely to Aristotle's four cardinal virtues of practical wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. Each virtue is defined as the appropriate disposition of one of the soul's faculties: the rational faculty, the irascible faculty, the appetitive faculty, and the faculty of their harmonious integration.

Al-Ghazali's treatment of virtues in the *Ihya Ulum al-Din* integrates this philosophical framework with Islamic spirituality. For Al-Ghazali, the virtues are not merely rational achievements but spiritual states (ahwal) cultivated through devotional practice (ibada), self-examination (muhasaba), and remembrance of God (dhikr). Al-Ghazali identifies Sabr (patience/steadfastness), Tawakkul (trust in God), Shukr (gratitude), and Ikhlas (sincerity) as specifically Islamic virtues not captured in the Greek philosophical framework, and argues that these virtues are the fruit of a deep personal relationship with God that goes beyond what rational ethics alone can prescribe.

4.2 The Virtues in the Dharmashastra Tradition

Dharmashastra's treatment of virtue centers on the concept of the sadgunas (good qualities) and their cultivation through adherence to one's dharma. The Manusmriti lists the following as common dharmas binding on all persons regardless of varna: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth-telling), Asteya (non-stealing), Shaucha (purity), Indriyanigraha (control of the senses), Dana (generosity), Dama (self-restraint), and Daya (compassion). These virtues are conceived not primarily as rational achievements but as expressions of dharmic alignment — the condition of a person who acts in accordance with the cosmic order.

The Bhagavad Gita, the most philosophically profound text in the Dharmashastra tradition, provides the most sophisticated treatment of virtues in the context of the three gunas (qualities of nature): Sattva (clarity, purity, harmony), Rajas (activity, passion, ambition), and Tamas (inertia, darkness, ignorance). The Gita's moral psychology holds that all human character traits and actions are expressions of these three fundamental qualities of nature, and that moral development consists in the progressive cultivation of sattva and the overcoming of rajas and tamas. This guna theory provides a psycho-cosmological framework for virtue ethics that has no close parallel in the Western or Islamic traditions.

4.3 Comparative Virtue Table

The following table maps key virtues across the Akhlaq and Dharmashastra traditions, demonstrating both convergences (shared moral concerns) and divergences (different emphases and framings):

Moral Domain	Arabic Virtue (Akhlāq)	Sanskrit Virtue (Dharmashastra)	Shared Concern	Key Divergence
Wisdom	Hikma (حكمة) Practical wisdom, right judgment	Prajna (प्रज्ञा) Discriminating wisdom, spiritual insight	Rational/spiritual guidance in action	Hikma is practical; Prajna is also soteriological
Courage	Shaja'a (شجاعة) Mean between cowardice and recklessness	Dhairya (धैर्य) Steadfast endurance, inner fortitude	Strength of character under adversity	Shaja'a is martial; Dhairya includes spiritual perseverance
Temperance	Iffah (عفة) Control of appetites; chastity	Indriyanigraha (इन्द्रियनिग्रह) Sensory self-control; brahmacharya	Mastery over bodily desires	Both traditions highly value ascetic control
Justice	Adl (عدل) Equity; giving each their due	Nyaya (न्याय) Logical/legal fairness; cosmic order	Right ordering of social relationships	Adl is distributive; Nyaya is also cosmic/logical
Truthfulness	Sidq (صدق) Veracity in speech and intention	Satya (सत्य) Truth as cosmic principle and virtue	Moral centrality of truth	Satya is ontological; Sidq is interpersonal
Compassion	Rahma (رحمة) Divine mercy reflected in human kindness	Karuna (करुणा) Compassion for all suffering beings	Care for others' suffering	Rahma flows from tawhid; Karuna from ahimsa/non-duality
Generosity	Karam/Sakhaa (كرم) Openhanded giving; hospitality	Dana (दान) Righteous giving as dharmic duty	Giving as moral excellence	Arabic generosity is social virtue; Dana is ritual-moral
Gratitude	Shukr (شكر) Gratitude to God and humans	Kritagyata (कृतज्ञता) Recognition of beneficence received	Reciprocal moral acknowledgment	Shukr is theocentric; Kritagyata is social and cosmic

Patience	Sabr (صبر) Endurance of hardship without complaint	Titiksha (तितिक्षा) Tolerance of extremes; equanimity	Equanimity in adversity	Sabr is active trust in God; Titiksha is inner detachment
Purity	Tahara (طهارة) Ritual and moral cleanliness	Shaucha (शौच) Internal and external purity	Cleanliness as moral-spiritual state	Tahara is heavily ritualized; Shaucha is both physical and mental
Non-Violence	(No direct term; harm forbidden)	Ahimsa (अहिंसा) Absolute non-injury to all beings	Prohibition of unjustified harm	Islam permits defensive violence; Ahimsa tends toward absolute
Sincerity	Ikhlas (إخلاص) Purity of intention; devotion to God alone	Nishkama karma (निष्काम कर्म) Desireless action without ulterior motive	Action freed from ego/self-interest	Ikhlas is theological; Nishkama karma is metaphysical

5. DUTY AND OBLIGATION: FARD AND DHARMA

5.1 Fard in Islamic Jurisprudence and Ethics

Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) has developed a highly systematic classification of human actions according to their moral-legal status. At the apex of this system is fard (also called wajib) — the category of obligatory acts, whose performance is rewarded by God and whose omission is sinful. The major categories of fard include: Fard al-Ayn (individual obligations binding on every Muslim, such as the five daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan, and zakah on eligible wealth) and Fard al-Kifaya (collective obligations binding on the Muslim community as a whole, such that if a sufficient number of community members fulfill them, the remaining members are released from obligation — examples include funeral prayers, the pursuit of certain forms of knowledge, and communal defense).

The Akhlaq tradition enriches the jurisprudential category of fard with a moral-psychological dimension. Al-Ghazali argues that the mere external fulfillment of obligatory duties is insufficient for moral excellence; what is required is that duties be performed with the right intention (niyyah), with presence of heart (hudur al-qalb), and with a spirit of sincere devotion to God rather than social conformity or self-interest. This internalization of duty — the movement from external compliance to genuine moral motivation — is the central project of the Akhlaq tradition as Al-Ghazali conceives it.

5.2 Dharma as Contextual Duty in Dharmashastra

Dharmashastra's concept of dharmic duty is more complex than the Islamic fard precisely because of its contextual nature. The tradition distinguishes between Samanya dharma (general duties binding on all

human beings), Vishesha dharma (particular duties of specific social roles), Apaddharma (emergency duties applicable in times of distress when ordinary dharma cannot be fulfilled), and Yuga dharma (the dharma appropriate to a particular cosmic age). This hierarchical and contextual framework gives Dharmashastra a flexibility in moral prescription that Islamic ethics, with its universalist thrust, does not easily accommodate.

The Bhagavad Gita's treatment of duty in its famous opening crisis — Arjuna's refusal to fight against his kinsmen — provides the most dramatic philosophical exploration of dharmic duty in the tradition. Krishna's response to Arjuna establishes the concept of svadharma (one's own duty) as paramount: it is better to perform one's own duty imperfectly than to perform another's duty well. This insistence on the irreducibly personal and role-specific nature of dharmic obligation represents one of the most distinctive features of Dharmashastra ethics, and one that stands in productive contrast to the universalist dimension of Islamic fard.

5.3 Comparison of Duty Frameworks

Dimension	Fard (Islamic Duty)	Dharma (Dharmashastra Duty)
Source of Authority	Divine command (Quran/Sunnah)	Cosmic order (Veda/Rta) and tradition (smriti)
Universal vs. Contextual	Largely universal — same for all Muslims	Highly contextual — varies by varna, ashrama, time
Individual vs. Collective	Both Fard al-Ayn and Fard al-Kifaya	Both individual svadharma and social samanya dharma
Role of Intention	Niyah (intention) essential for validity	Bhava (inner disposition) essential for purity
Consequence of Breach	Sin (ithm); divine punishment in akhira	Karmic consequence; adharma leading to paap
Flexibility in Hardship	Rukhsa (concession) in cases of necessity	Apaddharma for times of extreme distress
Relation to Virtue	Virtues cultivated through fulfilling fard	Virtue (sadguna) and duty (dharma) mutually reinforce
Philosophical Basis	Theocentric; God as supreme legislator	Cosmotheistic; cosmic order as moral ground

6. INTENTION AND MORAL AGENCY: NIYYAH AND BHAVA

One of the most significant areas of convergence between the Akhlaq and Dharmashastra traditions is in their treatment of intention as a component of moral evaluation. Both traditions insist that the moral worth of an action cannot be assessed by its external form alone; the inner disposition from which it springs is equally or more important.

In Islam, the centrality of intention in moral evaluation is established by the famous hadith of the Prophet: *Innamal a'malu binniyyat* — Verily, actions are judged by intentions. *Niyyah* (intention or resolve) is a technical concept in Islamic jurisprudence and ethics, referring to the conscious orientation of the will toward a specific act for God's sake. An act of worship performed without the proper intention is legally and morally invalid, even if externally correct. The *Akhlaq* tradition extends this principle from acts of worship to the whole of moral life, arguing that the cultivation of sincerity (*ikhlas*) — performing all actions purely for God's sake, free from ostentation (*riya*) and self-interest — is the highest moral achievement.

In *Dharmashastra*, the equivalent concept is *bhava* (inner disposition or feeling), combined with the *Gita's* concept of *nishkama karma* (desireless action). The *Bhagavad Gita's* central moral teaching — performing one's duty without attachment to the fruits of action (*phala*) — is essentially a doctrine of pure intention: what matters morally is not the outcome of the action (which is beyond one's control) but the quality of the motivation from which it springs. Action performed from ego, desire, or fear of consequence is morally inferior to action performed from a pure sense of dharmic duty, free from personal calculation. The *Gita's* concept of *yajna* (sacrifice) generalizes this principle: all action, when performed as an offering (*arpana*) to the Divine without self-seeking, becomes sacred.

The parallel between Islamic *ikhlas* and the *Gita's* *nishkama karma* is one of the most striking convergences between the two traditions. Both identify the purification of motivation as the highest level of moral development. Both insist that the same external act can be morally excellent or morally deficient depending entirely on the inner disposition of the agent. And both connect this pure intentionality to a transcendent reference point — God in the Islamic case, the Divine/Brahman in the *Dharmashastra* case — that removes the ego from the center of moral agency. This convergence was noted by several Sufi-Vedantist thinkers of medieval India, including *Dara Shikoh*, who explicitly drew connections between the Sufi concept of *fana* (annihilation of the self in God) and the Vedantic concept of *jivatma* merging with *Paramatma*, both of which presuppose the transcendence of ego-centered motivation.

7. JUSTICE: ADL AND NYAYA

7.1 Adl in Islamic Ethics

Justice (*Adl*) occupies a position of supreme importance in Islamic ethics and political philosophy. The *Quran* repeatedly commands justice: *Inna Allaha ya'muru bil-adli wal-ihsani* — Verily, God commands justice and benevolence (*Quran* 16:90). In the *Akhlaq* tradition, *Adl* is identified as one of the four cardinal virtues (along with *Hikma*, *Shaja'a*, and *Iffah*) and is conceived as the virtue that integrates all the others: the just person is one who maintains the right proportion between all the faculties of the soul and all aspects of social life.

Islamic legal and political philosophy develops the concept of *Adl* in several dimensions: *Adl* in personal conduct (treating others as one would wish to be treated); *Adl* in social relations (equal treatment before the law); *Adl* in political governance (rulers dispensing justice impartially); and *Adl* as a cosmic attribute of God (divine justice as the ultimate ground of all moral order). The concept of *Maqasid al-Shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law), developed by *Al-Ghazali* and later systematized by *Al-Shatibi*, identifies the protection of five essential human interests — life (*nafs*), reason (*aql*), lineage (*nasl*), property (*mal*), and religion (*din*) — as the overriding goal of Islamic justice, providing a consequentialist dimension to Islamic ethics that complements its deontological emphasis on divine commands.

7.2 Nyaya in Dharmashastra

The Sanskrit concept of Nyaya operates on multiple levels in the Dharmashastra tradition. At the philosophical-logical level, Nyaya refers to the ancient Indian school of logic and epistemology founded by Gautama (c. 2nd century BCE), which developed rigorous methods of argumentation and evidence. At the legal-moral level, nyaya means justice, equity, and right judgment — the application of dharma to specific cases through rational deliberation. At the cosmic level, nyaya is connected to the Vedic concept of rta — the right order of things — and implies that justice is not merely a human convention but an expression of cosmic truth.

Dharmashastra's treatment of legal justice (vyavahara) is highly sophisticated, covering evidentiary standards, judicial procedures, categories of legal dispute, and remedies. The Arthashastra of Kautilya provides a particularly detailed and pragmatic treatment of state justice, including provisions for intelligence gathering, economic regulation, and the prevention of corruption that remain remarkably modern in their concerns. The concept of Rajadharma (the dharma of the king) establishes justice as the primary obligation of the ruler — a king who fails to dispense justice violates his own dharma and incurs karmic consequence.

Dimension	Adl (Islamic Justice)	Nyaya (Dharmashastra Justice)
Metaphysical Ground	Attribute of God; divine moral order	Cosmic rta; dharmic order of the universe
Personal Dimension	Fair treatment of all in daily life	Sadachara (right conduct) in personal relations
Social Dimension	Equality before divine law (shariah)	Vyavahara — legal equity in dispute resolution
Political Dimension	Just ruler obligated by sharia	Rajadharma — king's primary obligation
Philosophical Basis	Theocentric; God as perfectly just	Cosmotheistic; justice as cosmic principle
Juridical Method	Ijtihad — rational derivation from sources	Mimamsa — interpretive analysis of texts
Ultimate Goal	Social welfare + divine pleasure	Lokasangraha — welfare of all beings

8. AKHLAQ, DHARMASHASTRA, AND THE IKS FRAMEWORK

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS), as conceptualized in recent Indian academic and policy discourse, refers to the totality of knowledge, methods, and wisdom traditions developed on the Indian subcontinent across millennia. NEP 2020 identifies IKS as a priority area for integration into higher education, calling for the development of curricula that draw on India's traditional intellectual heritage while connecting it to contemporary knowledge needs.

A narrow interpretation of IKS would limit it to the Sanskrit-Vedic tradition — the Vedas, Upanishads, Darshanas, Ayurveda, Ganita, Jyotisha, and related disciplines. This paper argues strongly against such a narrow interpretation on both historical and philosophical grounds. Historically, India's intellectual landscape has never been coextensive with the Sanskrit-Vedic tradition alone. Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and — most relevantly for the present study — Arabic-Islamic intellectual traditions have been deeply embedded in Indian intellectual life for centuries and have made constitutive contributions to India's composite culture. The Akhlaq tradition, in particular, has been taught in Indian madrasas for seven centuries, has shaped the moral sensibilities of India's Muslim population (approximately 200 million people, among the world's largest Muslim populations), and has produced distinctively Indian expressions such as the poetry of Ghalib and Iqbal, the political philosophy of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, and the syncretic philosophy of Dara Shikoh.

Philosophically, the inclusion of Akhlaq within IKS is justified by the fact that the Akhlaq tradition, as it developed in India, was not simply imported wholesale from Arab or Persian contexts but was deeply transformed by its encounter with the Indian intellectual environment. Indian Akhlaq texts engage directly with Hindu philosophical concepts, draw on Sanskrit literary forms, and address distinctively Indian social and ethical concerns. The Mughal emperor Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi — a syncretic moral and religious movement that drew on both Islamic and Hindu ethical principles — represents perhaps the most dramatic historical example of this Indian synthesis.

The comparison of Akhlaq and Dharmashastra within an IKS framework reveals that these two traditions are not competing alternatives for India's moral curriculum but complementary perspectives that together produce a richer moral philosophy than either provides alone. Where Akhlaq contributes a strong theocentric framework for moral motivation, universal human dignity, and individual moral accountability, Dharmashastra contributes a sophisticated contextual ethics, a cosmological framework for human action, and a tradition of non-violence (ahimsa) that has few parallels in world moral philosophy. Together, they address the full range of moral concerns that contemporary India faces: individual character development, social justice, environmental ethics, political accountability, and spiritual self-cultivation.

9. CURRICULAR RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER NEP 2020

NEP 2020 identifies value education, ethical citizenship, and the integration of IKS as central priorities for higher education in India. The present study suggests the following concrete curricular recommendations for integrating Akhlaq and Dharmashastra into the higher education curriculum at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

9.1 Proposed Core Course: Comparative Moral Philosophy — Akhlaq and Dharmashastra

A foundational course of 4 credits at the undergraduate level should be developed covering the following modules:

- Module 1 (4 weeks): Introduction to Moral Philosophy — Why ethics? Sources of moral knowledge in different traditions. Overview of Islamic and Hindu moral frameworks.
- Module 2 (4 weeks): Metaphysical Foundations — Tawhid and divine command theory vs. Rta/Dharma and cosmic law. Comparative analysis of theological vs. cosmological ethics.

- Module 3 (4 weeks): Virtue Ethics — Aristotle's legacy in Akhlaq; Guna theory and sadgunas in Dharmashastra. Comparative virtue table analysis and contemporary applications.
- Module 4 (4 weeks): Duty and Obligation — Fard and its categories in Islamic fiqh; Dharma and its contextual modulations in Dharmashastra. Case studies in ethical decision-making.
- Module 5 (4 weeks): Intention and Moral Psychology — Niyyah and ikhlas in Akhlaq; Bhava and nishkama karma in Dharmashastra. Moral motivation and character formation.
- Module 6 (4 weeks): Justice and Social Ethics — Adl and Maqasid al-Shariah; Nyaya and Rajadharmas. Contemporary applications to social justice, governance, and human rights.

9.2 Recommended Primary Texts

Text	Tradition	Recommended Use
Miskawayh — Tahdhib al-Akhlaq (selections)	Arabic Akhlaq	Core reading for virtue ethics module
Al-Ghazali — Ihya Ulum al-Din, Book 3 (Moral Vices)	Arabic Akhlaq	Moral psychology and intention
Nasir al-Din al-Tusi — Akhlaq-i-Nasiri (selections)	Persian Akhlaq (India)	Contextualizing Akhlaq in Indian tradition
Bhagavad Gita (Chapters 2, 3, 12, 16, 17)	Sanskrit Dharmashastra	Core reading for duty, virtue, intention
Manusmriti — Sadachara sections (selections)	Sanskrit Dharmashastra	Social ethics and contextual duty
Arthashastra of Kautilya (Books 1, 3)	Sanskrit Dharmashastra	Political ethics and justice
Mahabharata, Shanti Parva (selections)	Sanskrit Dharmashastra	Philosophical treatment of dharma
Dara Shikoh — Majma ul-Bahrain	Indo-Islamic Synthesis	Historical example of Akhlaq-Dharmashastra dialogue
Allama Iqbal — Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam	Modern Indian Akhlaq	Contemporary relevance of Islamic ethics in India

9.3 Pedagogical Approaches

The following pedagogical approaches are recommended for delivering the proposed curriculum effectively in the Indian higher education context:

- Comparative textual analysis: Students read parallel passages from Akhlaq and Dharmashastra texts on the same moral question and analyze convergences and divergences.

- Case-study method: Contemporary ethical dilemmas (environmental ethics, bioethics, political corruption, social media behavior) are analyzed using both Akhlaq and Dharmashastra frameworks.
- Dialogue format seminars: Students are assigned to represent the perspective of one tradition and engage in structured dialogue with students representing the other, developing skills of empathetic cross-traditional understanding.
- Research paper requirement: Students write original comparative papers identifying a specific moral concept and analyzing it in both traditions.
- Community engagement: Students interview practitioners (scholars, imams, pandits, lay practitioners) of both traditions about how they apply their moral frameworks in daily life.

9.4 Expected Learning Outcomes

- Students demonstrate knowledge of key concepts and texts in both the Akhlaq and Dharmashastra traditions.
- Students can identify and analyze convergences and divergences between the two traditions on specific moral questions.
- Students develop cross-traditional empathy and the ability to appreciate moral frameworks different from their own cultural background.
- Students apply comparative moral frameworks to contemporary ethical dilemmas relevant to Indian society.
- Students appreciate the Arabic-Islamic tradition as part of India's composite intellectual heritage within the IKS framework.

10. Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a systematic comparison of Arabic ethics (Akhlaq) and Sanskrit Dharmashastra as complementary traditions of moral philosophy within the Indian Knowledge System. The analysis has demonstrated several major findings that have both scholarly and practical significance.

First, despite their different metaphysical foundations — Islamic ethics grounded in divine command and prophetic example, Dharmashastra grounded in cosmic order and contextual duty — the two traditions share a remarkable convergence of core moral concerns. Both treat virtue as a cultivated disposition rather than an innate quality. Both insist on the centrality of intention in moral evaluation. Both develop sophisticated accounts of justice as both an individual virtue and a social-cosmic principle. And both situate individual moral development within a transpersonal framework — divine accountability in Islam, karmic-dharmic order in Hinduism — that gives moral action a significance beyond mere social utility.

Second, the divergences between the two traditions are as philosophically productive as their convergences. The tension between Islamic universalism (the same fard binding on all Muslims) and Dharmashastra's contextual particularism (svadharma varying by varna and ashrama) raises profound questions about the nature of moral obligation that contemporary ethical theory is still grappling with. The contrast between the Gita's concept of ahimsa as an absolute value and Islam's conditional permission of defensive violence raises urgent questions for peace ethics. The different role assigned to asceticism and world-renunciation in the two traditions raises questions about the relationship between spiritual development and social engagement.

Third, the historical meeting of these two traditions on Indian soil produced a distinctive Indo-Islamic moral culture whose monuments — the poetry of Ghalib, the philosophy of Iqbal, the political thought of Azad, the syncretic vision of Dara Shikoh — are among the greatest achievements of Indian civilization. Recovering and studying this synthesis is not merely an act of historical curiosity but a contribution to the ongoing project of building a morally coherent and plurally inclusive Indian society.

Fourth, and most practically, the integration of Akhlaq and Dharmashastra comparison into the IKS curriculum under NEP 2020 offers a concrete and educationally powerful way to fulfill NEP's goals of value education, civilizational self-awareness, and intercultural understanding. Young Indians who study both traditions will be equipped not only with a richer moral vocabulary but with the intellectual capacity to navigate moral complexity, to appreciate ethical perspectives different from their own, and to contribute to the ongoing civilizational dialogue that has always been India's greatest strength.

India is the inheritor of multiple philosophical traditions, each making irreplaceable contributions to human wisdom. A genuine Indian Knowledge System must be large enough to contain them all. The comparison of Akhlaq and Dharmashastra is not a marginal exercise for specialists; it is at the very heart of what it means to think seriously about ethics in India today.

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