

The Lost Language of Dharma

*Relearning Śāstra, Symbolism, and Inner
Transformation in Sanātana Dharma*



Light the lamp of inquiry and
remove the darkness of ignorance.



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Transformation in Sanātana Dharma*



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(Sanatana Revealed)

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The interpretations presented in this work are offered respectfully and in good faith, based upon study of primary Śāstric sources and related traditions. Sanātana Dharma contains diverse philosophical schools, sampradāyas, and interpretive traditions; readers are encouraged to engage directly with original texts and multiple commentarial perspectives.

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy in Sanskrit references, transliterations, translations, and interpretations. Any inadvertent errors remain the responsibility of the author.

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Disclaimer : This book does not seek to insult, diminish, or invalidate any faith tradition, sampradāya, deity, devotional practice, or sincere spiritual path. Its purpose is to encourage deeper engagement with the philosophical, symbolic, and transformative dimensions of Sanātana Dharma through thoughtful reflection and study of Śāstra.

Readers are encouraged to approach the subject with openness, humility, and discernment.

Dedication

To all sincere seekers
who choose inquiry over imitation,
understanding over repetition,
and inner transformation over mere appearance.

And to the timeless wisdom of Sanātana Dharma,
which continues to guide those willing to reflect deeply,
live consciously, and seek truth with humility.

Invocation

Sanskrit

असतो मा सद्गमय ।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।
मृत्योर्माऽमृतं गमय ॥

Transliteration

asato mā sad gamaya
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya
mr̥tyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya

Meaning

Lead me from the unreal to the real.
Lead me from darkness to light.
Lead me from mortality to immortality.

— *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.3.28)

धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायाम् ।

dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām

“The essence of Dharma lies hidden in
subtlety.”

— *Mahābhārata*

Author's Note

This book was written from a simple but deeply felt concern: that many people today remain emotionally connected to Sanātana Dharma while gradually becoming disconnected from its deeper philosophical and transformative foundations.

Over time, stories have often replaced understanding, repetition has replaced reflection, and identity has overshadowed inquiry. Yet the original Śāstric traditions repeatedly invite the seeker not merely to believe, but to contemplate, question, refine, and transform.

The purpose of this work is not to diminish devotion or tradition, but to encourage a more conscious engagement with them.

If this book inspires even a small movement toward deeper study of Śāstra, thoughtful reflection, and sincere inner growth, it will have served its purpose.

Preface

We live in a time where information about Sanātana Dharma is everywhere, yet understanding often remains fragmented.

Stories from the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Bhagavad Gītā, and Purāṇas circulate constantly through: television, cinema, social media, public discourse, devotional gatherings and short-form content.

People recognize names, characters, symbols, and festivals. Yet increasingly, many engage with these traditions without ever directly encountering the deeper philosophical, ethical, psychological, and spiritual foundations from which they emerged.

Over time, a subtle shift has taken place. Narratives that once served as instruments of reflection and transformation are often approached only as: entertainment, inherited identity, miracle-centered storytelling, or emotional familiarity.

As this happens, the deeper language of Dharma slowly fades beneath repetition. This book emerged from concern regarding that growing distance between:

- Śāstra and assumption,
- symbolism and literalism,
- devotion and understanding,
- and tradition and inner transformation.

The purpose of this work is not to attack faith, reject devotion, or diminish the sacredness of traditional narratives. On the contrary, it arises from the belief that genuine reverence requires deeper engagement rather than passive repetition alone.

Sanātana Dharma was never merely a system of inherited labels or unquestioned customs. At its heart, it has always involved: inquiry, contemplation, self-discipline, refinement of conduct, understanding of consciousness and alignment with Dharma.

Yet today, many people first encounter these traditions not through direct study of Śāstra, but through dramatized retellings, simplified explanations, internet debates, or fragmented quotations removed from context. This has created several misunderstandings.

Many now assume:

- that Dharma simply means “religion,”
- that devotion excludes inquiry,
- that sacred narratives must be either blindly literal or entirely fictional,
- or that the lives of figures such as Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa exist only for worship and not also for human reflection and refinement.

Similarly, symbolic and psychological dimensions embedded within sacred narratives are often overlooked entirely.

The battle between devas and asuras becomes merely external warfare rather than also a reflection of the struggle within human consciousness.

Līlā becomes entertainment rather than spiritual teaching. Bhakti becomes emotional intensity without transformation. And Dharma itself gradually becomes reduced to identity rather than lived practice.

This book attempts to revisit these questions carefully and respectfully.

Its aim is not to provide final answers to every philosophical issue, nor to erase the diversity of interpretations that exist within Sanātana traditions. Rather, it seeks to encourage readers to return toward:

- primary Śāstric engagement,
- thoughtful reflection,
- philosophical depth,
- and a more conscious relationship with sacred narratives.

Throughout this work, emphasis has been placed wherever possible upon foundational sources such as: the Bhagavad Gītā, the Upaniṣads, the Vedas, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata and related traditions.

Primary Sanskrit references have been included intentionally so that readers may gradually reconnect not only with interpretations, but with the original language and conceptual structure of the tradition itself.

This book is therefore neither an attempt to weaken devotion nor an attempt to impose rigid intellectualism.

It is an attempt to restore balance: between bhakti and viveka, between reverence and inquiry, between story and meaning and between outer practice and inner transformation.

If this work encourages readers to pause more deeply before accepting inherited assumptions, to return to Śāstra with humility and sincerity, and to reflect more consciously upon what Dharma is truly asking of human life, then it will have fulfilled its purpose.

How to Read This Book

This book is not meant to be read merely as a collection of religious opinions, nor as an attempt to reduce Sanātana Dharma into rigid conclusions. Its purpose is to encourage deeper engagement with the philosophical, symbolic, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the Dharmic tradition.

Many readers may approach this work from different backgrounds:

- some through devotion,
- some through intellectual curiosity,
- some through confusion,
- and some through prior exposure to stories, television adaptations, or popular discourse.

For this reason, the book has been written in a narrative style that gradually moves from familiar ideas toward deeper reflection.

Read Slowly and Reflectively

This book is best approached slowly rather than hurriedly.

Many chapters are not merely presenting information; they are inviting reflection. Certain ideas may initially challenge long-held assumptions, while others may help reconnect familiar stories with deeper meaning.

Readers are encouraged not merely to ask: “Do I agree or disagree?”

but also:

- Why did this tradition express ideas in this way?
- What deeper principle is being pointed toward?

- What does this reveal about human nature, consciousness, and conduct?
- How does this apply to life itself?

The goal is not passive reading, but thoughtful engagement.

Understand the Layered Nature of Śāstric Narratives

One of the central themes of this book is that many Dharmic narratives operate on multiple levels simultaneously.

A story may be: devotional, symbolic, psychological, philosophical, ethical and spiritual at the same time.

Readers are therefore encouraged to avoid two extremes:

- reducing everything into literalism alone,
- or dismissing everything as mere allegory or fiction.

The traditions of Sanātana Dharma have historically allowed layered interpretation.

This book attempts to explore those layers respectfully.

Scriptural References Are Meant to Be Read Carefully

Throughout the book, primary Śāstric references are presented in four stages:

1. Original Sanskrit

2. Transliteration
3. Direct meaning
4. Expanded explanation or essence

This structure has been used intentionally.

The purpose is not merely quotation, but understanding. Readers unfamiliar with Sanskrit should not feel intimidated. The transliteration and explanations are provided so that even those new to Śāstra can gradually become comfortable engaging with original sources.

This Book Encourages Inquiry, Not Blind Acceptance

Sanātana Dharma possesses a long tradition of: dialogue, inquiry, contemplation, debate and philosophical reflection.

This book follows that spirit.

Readers are encouraged to think deeply, reflect sincerely, compare interpretations carefully, and continue exploring beyond this text. At the same time, inquiry should be approached with humility rather than cynicism or intellectual arrogance.

The aim is understanding, not argument for its own sake.

Devotion and Reflection Need Not Oppose Each Other

Some readers may come from strongly devotional backgrounds and may initially feel uncomfortable when familiar narratives are discussed symbolically or psychologically. Others may approach the tradition only intellectually while overlooking the role of devotion, reverence, and inner refinement.

This book attempts to maintain balance between:

- bhakti and viveka,
- reverence and inquiry,
- philosophy and practice.

The intention is not to weaken devotion, but to deepen it through understanding.

Do Not Treat This Book as the Final Word

Sanātana Dharma is vast. No single book, teacher, interpretation, or perspective can exhaust its depth completely.

This work should therefore be seen as: an invitation, a starting point and a framework for deeper engagement.

Readers are encouraged to continue studying: the Bhagavad Gītā, the Upaniṣads, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Vedas, and traditional commentarial literature directly and patiently.

The Purpose of This Book

Ultimately, this book asks the reader to move beyond merely inheriting stories toward understanding their purpose.

Not merely:

“What happened in the story?”

but also:

- What does this reveal about the human condition?
- What inner transformation is being encouraged?
- What kind of human being is Dharma asking us to become?

If these questions begin arising sincerely within the reader, then this book has fulfilled its purpose.

Conceptual Disclaimer

This book has been written with deep respect for Sanātana Dharma, its sacred traditions, and the countless generations through whom its wisdom has been preserved.

The purpose of this work is not: to diminish devotion, to reject tradition, to promote hostility toward any sampradaya or to claim exclusive authority over interpretation. Rather, the intention is to encourage a more conscious, reflective, and Śāstra-oriented engagement with the philosophical, symbolic, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the Dharmic tradition.

Sanātana Dharma is vast and internally diverse. Different: philosophical schools, devotional traditions, teachers, commentators, and lineages have interpreted many concepts and narratives differently across centuries. This book does not deny or erase that diversity.

At the same time, modern understanding of Dharma has often become shaped more by: popular retellings, visual media, inherited assumptions, fragmentary quotations and surface-level interpretation than by direct engagement with foundational Śāstric sources.

This work therefore attempts to encourage readers to revisit: the Bhagavad Gītā, the Upaniṣads, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Vedas and related traditions with greater inquiry, reflection, and philosophical depth.

Many narratives discussed in this book are approached not only literally or devotionally, but also symbolically, psychologically, ethically, and spiritually. Such interpretive approaches have long existed within multiple Indian philosophical and spiritual traditions. These interpretations are not presented to negate devotion, but to deepen understanding.

The reader is encouraged to approach this book with: openness, humility, discernment and thoughtful reflection. The ultimate aim is

not argument or ideological rigidity, but a sincere attempt to reconnect: story with meaning, devotion with understanding and Śāstra with inner transformation. If this book encourages even a small movement from passive repetition toward deeper inquiry and conscious living, it will have served its purpose.

Introduction

The Distance Between Story and Understanding

Sanātana Dharma is perhaps one of the few surviving civilizational traditions in the world where philosophy, psychology, ethics, metaphysics, ritual, poetry, devotion, and inner transformation were never seen as completely separate from one another. The same civilization that composed profound inquiries into consciousness and existence also expressed those truths through stories, symbols, dialogues, festivals, music, and collective memory.

For centuries, these teachings were not merely preserved in books. They lived through recitation, discussion, reflection, discipline, and lived practice. Dharma was not understood as a weekly activity, nor merely as a declaration of belief. It shaped the way one thought, acted, spoke, learned, governed, worshipped, and understood oneself in relation to the world.

Over time, however, a gradual distance emerged between people and their own Śāstra.

The stories remained alive, but their deeper intent often became blurred. Rituals continued, but many no longer understood the principles they were meant to cultivate internally. Reverence survived, yet inquiry weakened. The names of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, Devī, and countless other forms continued to inspire devotion, but the philosophical and transformative dimensions behind these narratives slowly became less accessible to ordinary people.

This distance did not emerge from a single event, nor can it be explained through a single cause. Historical invasions, destruction of

educational institutions, colonial reinterpretations, loss of Sanskrit literacy, fragmentation of traditional learning systems, social rigidity, overdependence on oral simplifications, and the rise of entertainment-driven retellings all contributed in different ways. As generations passed, many inherited fragments of memory without inheriting the interpretive tools needed to understand them deeply.

In the modern world, a large number of people encounter Sanātana Dharma not through direct engagement with primary Śāstra, but through television serials, films, short videos, social media posts, sectarian arguments, or isolated stories repeated without context. Characters from the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa are often understood more through dramatized portrayals than through the texts themselves. Dialogues never spoken in Śāstra become accepted as truth simply through repetition. Complex philosophical ideas are reduced to simplistic moral binaries. Symbolic narratives are interpreted only literally, while at other times everything is dismissed as mere mythology without attempting to understand the layers through which ancient traditions communicated knowledge.

One of the most significant consequences of this shift is that many people gradually stopped seeing Śāstric narratives as mirrors for human refinement and began treating them as distant supernatural events belonging only to divine beings. When people hear about the discipline of Śrī Rāma, the clarity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the tapas of the ṛṣis, or the steadfastness of great seekers, the response often becomes:

“They were Bhagavān,” or “They were extraordinary beings; ordinary humans cannot live like that.”

Yet the purpose of these narratives was never merely passive admiration. The great figures of Itihāsa and Śāstra were not presented only to be worshipped from a distance, but to demonstrate possibilities of human refinement, responsibility, restraint, wisdom, courage, devotion, and inner growth. The intention was not to create excuses for human weakness, but to offer direction toward greater consciousness.

This does not mean every narrative must be reduced only to symbolism, nor does it mean devotion should be rejected in favor of dry intellectualism. Sanātana Dharma has always allowed multiple layers of understanding to coexist. A story may simultaneously carry devotional, ethical, symbolic, psychological, metaphysical, and spiritual meaning. The problem arises when only the outer layer survives while the inner purpose is forgotten.

The purpose of this book is not to attack faith, ridicule tradition, or dismiss devotion. Nor is it an attempt to claim that generations before us “understood everything wrongly.” Traditions naturally evolve across time, geography, language, and culture. Bhakti traditions themselves preserved enormous aspects of Dharma through periods of political instability and social disruption. This book is written with gratitude toward that continuity.

At the same time, continuity alone is not enough if understanding gradually weakens. A civilization survives not merely by repeating its stories, but by remaining connected to the wisdom those stories were meant to communicate.

This book is therefore an attempt to return, as respectfully and honestly as possible, to foundational Śāstric understanding. Wherever possible, primary sources such as the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, and related texts will be used directly. Sanskrit verses will be presented along with transliteration, meaning, and simplified explanation so that readers unfamiliar with Sanskrit can still engage with the ideas meaningfully.

The goal is not simply to provide information, but to encourage a different way of approaching Dharma itself — not merely as identity, inheritance, or ritual performance, but as a living process of inquiry, understanding, discipline, and transformation.

To recover the lost language of Dharma is not merely to relearn old words. It is to relearn how to see.

PART I :Understanding Dharma Before Understanding Stories

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Chapter 1

What Is Dharma?

Few words in human civilization are as widely used and yet as deeply misunderstood as the word *Dharma*. In modern conversation, it is often translated simply as “religion.” While this translation may appear convenient, it is incomplete and sometimes deeply misleading.

When many people hear the word “religion,” they usually think of a system centered around:

- belief,
- worship,
- institutional identity,
- membership,
- doctrine,
- or a specific relationship between human beings and God.

But the Sanskrit word *Dharma* operates in a much broader and deeper framework.

Dharma is not merely about what one believes. It is also about:

- how one lives,

- how one acts,
- how one thinks,
- how one relates to others,
- how one aligns with truth,
- and how both the individual and society remain sustained in harmony.

This is why many traditional definitions of Dharma do not define it through belief systems at all.

One of the most cited definitions comes from the Mahābhārata:

Primary Śāstra Reference

Source: Mahābhārata

Sanskrit : धारणाद्धर्म इत्याहुर्धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः ।

Transliteration : dhāraṇād dharma ity āhur dharmo dhārayate prajāḥ

Meaning

Dharma is called Dharma because it upholds and sustains beings. At first glance, this definition may appear simple. Yet within it lies an entire civilizational worldview.

Dharma is not presented here as a sect, a label, or an institutional religion. It is described as that which sustains. That which preserves order. That which prevents collapse - internally and externally.

A family survives through Dharma when truth, responsibility, and mutual respect are upheld. A society survives through Dharma when justice, restraint, and ethical conduct are preserved. Even the human mind remains stable only when governed by some form of inner Dharma - discipline, clarity, and balance.

Without Dharma, both the individual and society gradually move toward disorder.

This broader understanding becomes even more important because modern discussions often reduce Sanātana Dharma to identity alone. Many people today say: “I am Hindu,” but rarely pause to ask: “What does Dharma actually require of me?”

If Dharma becomes merely a label inherited by birth, then its transformative dimension begins to disappear.

The Bhagavad Gītā repeatedly shifts attention away from mere identity and toward conduct, consciousness, and responsibility. One’s actions, intentions, discipline, and inner state matter deeply within the Dharmic framework.

Dharma therefore is not merely something one “belongs to.” It is something one attempts to live. This distinction is extremely important.

A person may perform rituals regularly and still act with dishonesty, cruelty, arrogance, or greed in daily life. Another person may possess humility, discipline, compassion, self-control, and sincerity even while lacking elaborate ritual practice. Śāstric discussions repeatedly force the reader to confront this uncomfortable but necessary question: What truly constitutes Dharmic living?

This is precisely why Dharma cannot be reduced only to external observance.

The ancient Indian worldview also connected Dharma with a larger cosmic order. The Vedic concept of *Rta* referred to the principle of universal order - the rhythm through which existence itself remains sustained. Seasons move in rhythm. Nature functions through balance. Actions produce consequences. Human conduct too was expected to align with this larger harmony rather than operate purely through impulse and selfish desire.

From this understanding emerges another important insight: Dharma is not arbitrary.

It is not merely a collection of rules imposed without purpose. Dharma exists because actions shape both the individual and the world around them. Anger affects relationships. Greed destabilizes society. Lack of restraint creates suffering. Truth builds trust. Discipline strengthens character. Compassion softens human life. Every action gradually participates either in harmony or disorder.

The Dharmic framework therefore consistently asks:

Does this action sustain or degrade?
Does it bring clarity or confusion?
Does it reduce suffering or increase it?
Does it align the human being with higher awareness or deeper ignorance?

Seen from this perspective, Dharma becomes a living inquiry rather than a fixed slogan.

Over time, however, many people began approaching Dharma primarily through inherited customs without understanding the philosophical foundation beneath them. Practices continued, but reflection weakened. In some cases, fear replaced inquiry. In others, identity replaced responsibility. The result was that Dharma increasingly became something defended outwardly rather than cultivated inwardly.

This confusion became even stronger during the colonial period, when European frameworks attempted to classify all civilizations according to categories familiar to them. The word “religion” became the default translation for Dharma, even though the conceptual structures were not identical. Gradually, generations began understanding their own traditions through borrowed categories.

This does not mean the word “religion” is entirely unusable in modern language. It simply means that Dharma extends far beyond what the English term usually conveys.

To understand Sanātana Dharma properly, one must therefore move beyond the question: “What religion do I belong to?”

and begin asking:

“How should a human being live?”

“What sustains individual and collective well-being?”

“What disciplines refine the mind?”

“What leads toward clarity rather than chaos?”

“What aligns human life with truth?”

These questions lie at the heart of Dharma. And perhaps this is why the great texts of Sanātana tradition rarely present Dharma as something simplistic. In the Mahābhārata especially, Dharma is often shown as subtle, contextual, and difficult. Even wise individuals struggle to determine the right course of action in complex situations. This itself is an important teaching. Dharma is not blind rigidity. It requires awareness, sincerity, discernment, and responsibility. The purpose of Dharma was never merely to create obedient followers. Its deeper aim was refinement of human consciousness. To reduce Dharma only to ritual identity is therefore to mistake the outer shell for the living essence within it.

Enjoyed the sample?

Continue your journey with *The Lost Language of Dharma*.

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