

Newsletter

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DISPATCHES FROM THE NORTH EAST | PANKAJ SAXENA

A Visible 'Faith' in the Centre of Nagaland

The church in focus is the Sumi Baptist Church, in Zunheboto, Nagaland, the second largest church in Asia by volume. Zunheboto is the central district of Nagaland, and should have been the capital of Nagaland if things were fair, and if Angamis living in Kohima had not been the most dominant tribe. Zunheboto however is populated with Sumi Nagas, another powerful Naga tribe, which is in constant struggle with the Angamis and other powerful tribes of Nagaland.

Zunheboto actually lies on the Naga Hills which form the central ridge of Nagaland, east of which are the Patkai ranges on Burma border, and west of which are the foothills rising from Assam, where Wokha and Tseminyu are, homes to Lotha and Rengma tribes. So you can imagine the setting of this place, on all sides are hills inhabited by Nagas as far as you can see, Yimkhuings to the east, Sangtams and Konyaks to the north, Lothas and Rengmas to the west, and Angamis and Pochurys to the south.

Home to the Sumis, the first tribe in Nagaland, which achieved hundred percent conversion to Christianity, it has a special place in the Christian folklore of the Nagas. It has produced some of the most able administrators and also some of the first Naga scholars who can stand their ground anywhere in the world. And if you didn't realize

yet, it is home to the Sumis, and only to the Sumi Nagas. Delving in the reasons makes you discover what Nagaland is. So there is no tribe which is Naga tribe as such. Naga is an umbrella term for many tribes like Angamis, Aos, Lothas, Rengmas, Konyaks, Sumis, Yimkhuings, Khanmniungans, Pochurys, Zeliangs, Tangkhuls, Noctes, Wanchos etc. This is not where it ends.

Every district of Nagaland is given to a different tribe. So the very administrative and political structure of the state is divided according to the tribal divisions of the Nagas. Every district is inhabited by a different tribe. And it is impossible for a Sumi to stand in election from any district other than his own. There simply won't be any takers. This is how deeply embedded in state's structure is the tribal, caste division of Nagaland is.

It so happens that due to Sumis being powerful, the district has very good infrastructure, especially compared to the districts near it. When I visited this church in Zunheboto, it was on a memorable day. We were on a long long drive since morning. Had started from Shamator, the place of Yimkhiung Nagas at six in the morning and after one of the most harrowing drives of my life, when our vehicle drove at 8-10 km/hr speed, we had reached Zunheboto. The path till Zunheboto,

although classed as a national highway, was non-existent. Mostly we drove through three to four feet high grass which we had to mow down by our car, and alternately there would be boulders and ditches big enough to swallow small cars. With no network, and no shops, even for cigarettes or anything else for most of the way, and the only locals you saw were NSCN or any such affiliated organization it was a ride which is legendary in memory, but which we wanted to end as soon as possible and when we entered the Sumi district and arrived in the city we were relieved since it was a town, the roads suddenly became two and four lane and completely well made, and we got our networks back.

We weren't to stop in Zunheboto as we were driving down to Kohima. But the most famous church of Zunheboto and entire Nagaland and north-east was in this town, the Sumi Baptist Church, which is the second largest church in entire Asia, that huge it is. It was smack on the highway, I mean a few metres off from the highway on a ridge. And this is again something which is typical of the Naga towns and the spread of Christianity there.

Nagas live on hilltops, right on top of them, not on slopes, not in valleys. Their khets, the fields are on slopes and valleys sometimes, but they never dwell there. And so all Naga villages, towns and even modern cities are on mountaintops. When the British arrived here and started converting the locals, the missionaries also chose the highest hill or highest point of any village or town, to build the church there. The higher the hill is, the bigger the church is with the highest hill sporting the biggest church which a tall cross planted on top of it, visible from miles and from many parallel hill ranges. The church commands the highest point in any town and the structure is so huge and imposing in comparison to anything else in the town and the entire state of Nagaland that everything pales in front of the 'glory of the God'. No matter where you are in town, you can see the church spire, hear its bells have its shadow follow you wherever you go. You can't escape Christ if you live in a Naga town.

On Sunday this setting becomes even more important as around 10 in the morning, every dressed in their best attire, starts walking or driving up the hill, to reach the church. The church is almost always uphill from where the church members live. And so in the morning, the entire

movement in the town is uphill, with members reaching the hill and after the service, before lunch all movement is downhill. As everything else shuts down on a Sunday in the Christian towns of Nagaland and Mizoram, this means that even the medical shops are almost completely shut and all you can see on a Sunday is movement for Christ, real, palpable and omnipresent.

But the landscape becomes more striking, with the geography of Nagaland lending itself to the missionary project. This setting makes sure that some of the largest churches of Nagaland are visible not only from everywhere inside the town in which they are, but also from neighbouring mountain ranges. Often it is only the church spire that is visible in any town from afar, and if you drive down through the Naga landscape the only thing that breaks the monotony of forested and jhum green hills, are the church spires.

The Sumi Baptist Church of Zunheboto being the largest of all Naga churches, commands an even more imposing image and is seen from almost 50% of the state of Nagaland. Imagine the majesty! All this makes sure that you can never miss the central church in any Naga town, be it Mokokchung, Wokha, Zunheboto or any other town. Often it is either right on the highway or a little away from it on the highest hill. And so we stopped at this church in Zunheboto, while being on our way to Kohima.

A church, no matter how big, is completely abandoned when it is not in service. Being a completely organized affair, a church, even as big as this, opens only on Sundays and festivals and only during the hours when the service is being held. The rest of the time it lies like an abandoned building. And so when I went to this second largest church of Asia, it was in this state, it being not a Sunday. The central hall is huge and is very high and it is something to stand there alone and see the Naga hills from every single window that this huge building has. A Hindu temple though, on the other hand, is a completely private, de-centralized and self-organized affair with scarcely anytime when a moderately big temple remains empty.

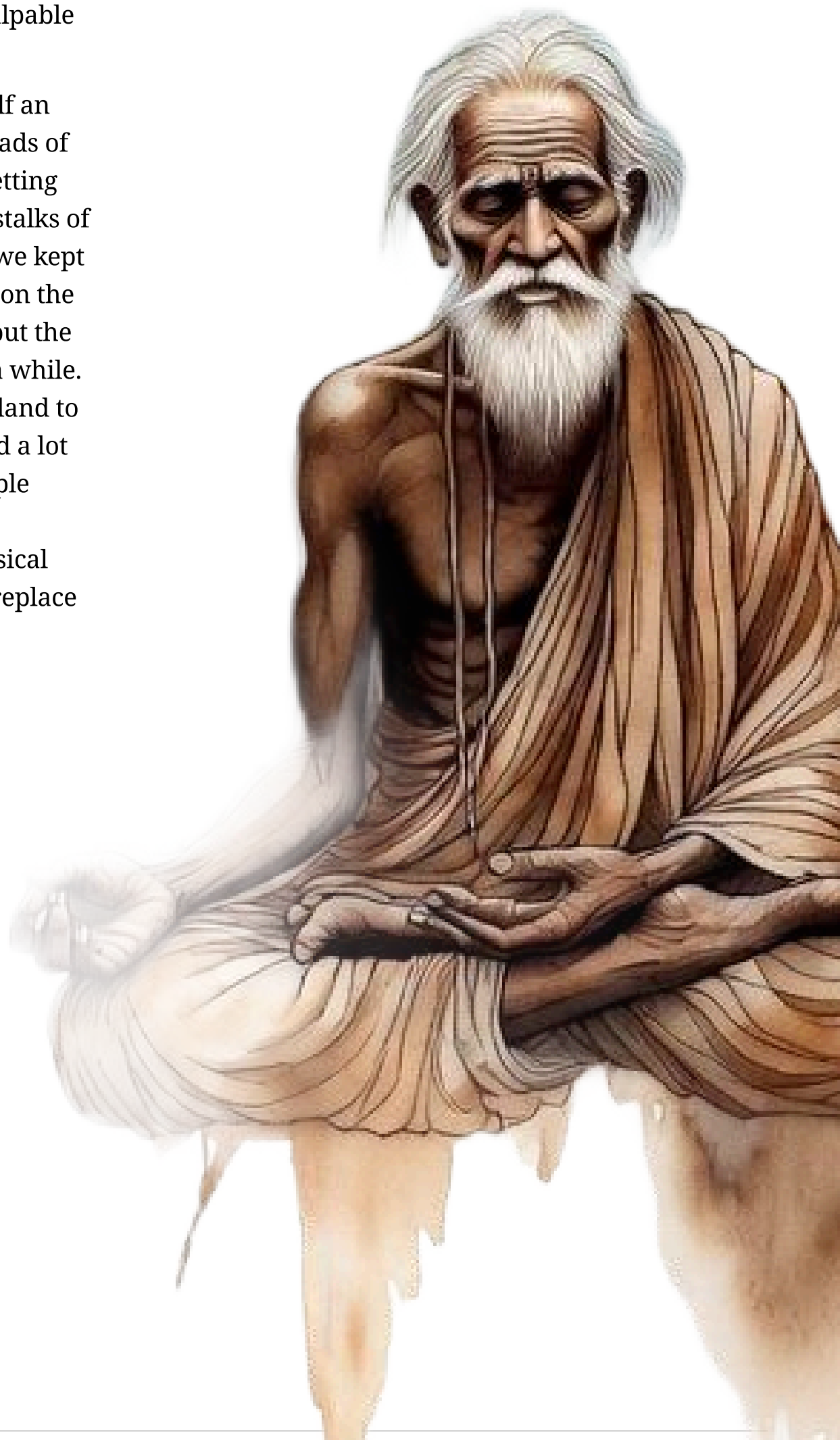
I did a pradakshina of the place instinctively, being a Hindu, and on all sides were the departments that makes the church an eco-system: car parking, residential quarters of some church officials, and then offices that oversaw the various departments of a church, and for a moment, if you are here walking too close to its walls and not looking at the

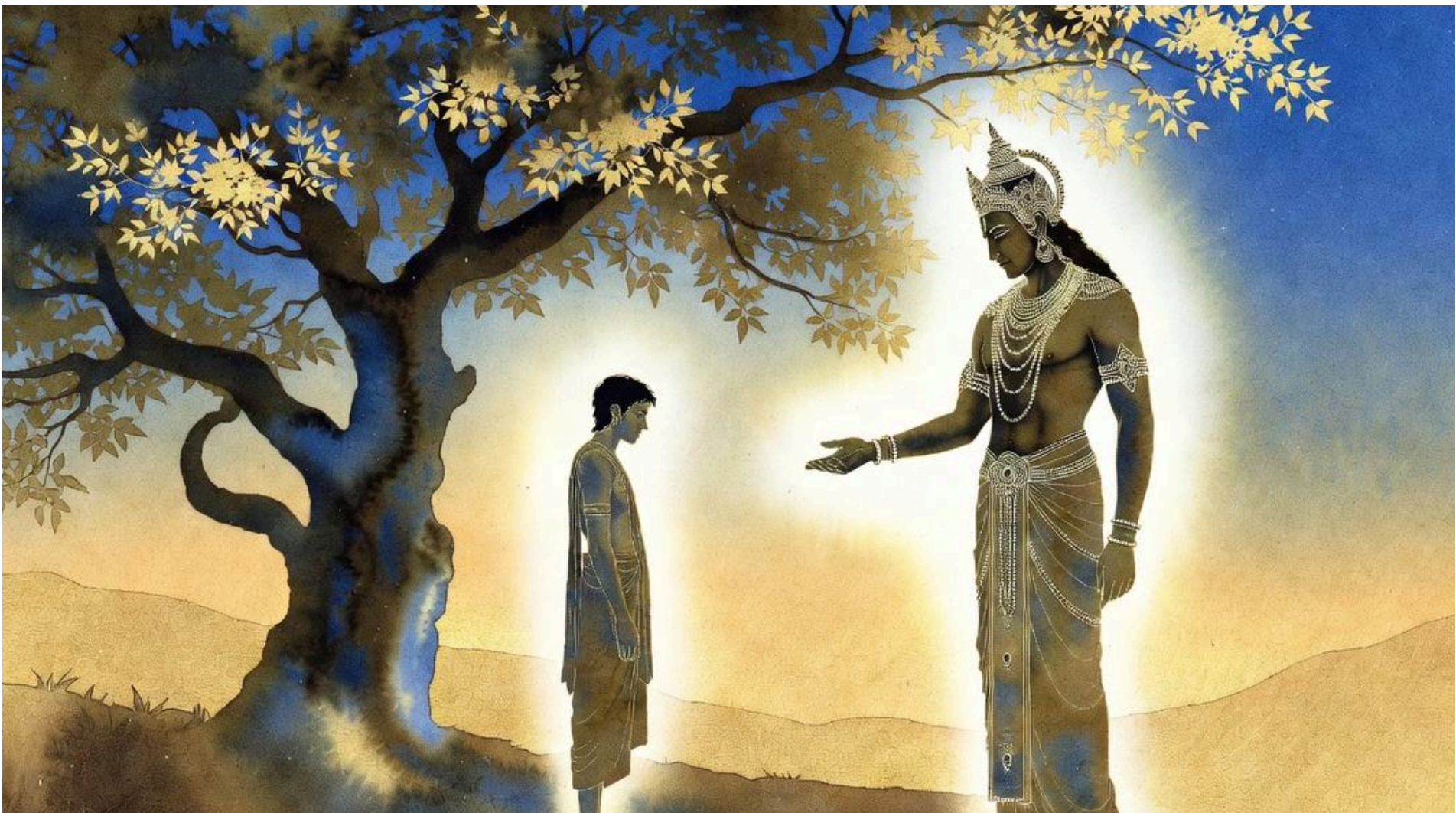
cross at the top, you may feel as if you are in a Hindu temple after the darshana, roaming around its offices.

Even only on Sundays and festivals, even centralized, the way Christianity has come to command the lives of Nagas in these places is something which has to be seen by a Hindu to believe, for he is not aware of any other such phenomenon in his life.

While the British prevented Hindus from going to these hills, and we became impoverished and engrossed in our affairs, Christianity with a fervour previously unknown took, through force and fraud, these hills of Nagaland, but then supplanted it with a faith that plays an actual role in the lives of the Nagas. All aspects of life is touched by religion and Christianity is as palpable presence in the life as is family.

As we left the church after I sat there for half an hour, and cruised through the wonderful roads of Zunheboto, towards Kohima, the sun was setting on the west, and shining through the dried stalks of grass it kept us company for a while, while we kept getting away and away from this church. Soon the Sun set and we stopped seeing the church, but the scene stayed with me and will be there for a while. If we want the indigenous religions of Nagaland to take root once again in these towns, we need a lot more than individual persuasion and a simple change. Something fervent, something revolutionary, something commanding physical and spiritual heights of Nagaland only can replace what Christianity has become here.





AKSHAY JHA

In Defence of Yudhishthira

Yudhishthira is often overlooked in discussions of the heroes of the Mahabharata. Yet, in my own reading of the epic, he emerged as one of its most striking characters.

He is not an easy character to admire. In an epic renowned for its grand battles and extraordinary feats of warfare, Yudhishthira is remembered less for martial glory than for his relentless pursuit of Dharma. One of the most remarkable sections of the epic is the conversation between Yudhishthira and Draupadi on Dharma in the Vana Parva.

He declares:

“I do not follow dharma because of the fruits of dharma, but because I do not want to transgress the traditional texts and wish to follow the conduct of the virtuous. O Krishna! My mind is naturally fixed on dharma. He who wishes to milk dharma does not obtain the fruits of dharma. Nor does the evil-minded atheist, who, having performed a task, has doubts. Do not doubt dharma, driven by pride or in an attempt to debate.”

Now, this is not an easy stand to take. Nor is this merely a proclamation by Yudhishthira. He actually lived his life this way. Even when everyone around him had outbursts over the suffering of the Pandavas, he remained committed to following Dharma to the best of his ability.

Draupadi, however, presents an argument that is

relatable to all of us. While reading this conversation, one is likely to agree with much of what she says.

She argues:

“My thoughts are agitated when I see that those who are good, righteous and modest suffer in their conduct, while evil ones are happy. O Partha! On witnessing your calamity and Suyodhana’s prosperity, I blame the creator who tolerates such inequality. He confers prosperity on Dhritarashtra’s cruel and avaricious son, who lowers dharma and transgresses what the virtuous sacred texts say. What fruits does the creator obtain from this? If a performed deed follows its performer and no one else, then the supreme god has certainly been tainted by this evil deed. Or if the evil that is done does not taint the performer, then strength alone is the cause of everything, and I grieve for those who are weak.”

Yudhishthira replies:

“If the dharma followed by those who observe dharma had no fruit, then this entire universe would have been immersed in darkness and would not have been established. No one would have progressed towards salvation. Everyone would have lived the life of animals. There would only have been restraints and nothing would have been earned or gained. If austerities, brahmacharya, sacrifices, studying, generosity and honesty did not have their fruits, then the ancient ones and those who came before them would not have observed these. If these deeds

did not have fruits, there would have been extreme confusion. Why do rishis, gods, gandharvas, asuras, rakshasas and all the other powerful lords follow dharma so assiduously? It is because they know that the Creator will grant the supreme fruits to those who follow dharma. O Krishna! This is eternal dharma.”

If one reflects more deeply on this conversation, one realizes that it is an internal conversation within our own minds. Both are correct from their own perspective and context. Whenever we undergo suffering, we tend to lose sight of our ideals. Yet, somewhere within us, there remains a voice reminding us to do the right thing. More often than not, the right thing is also the most difficult thing. It's not because of external obstacles, but because it requires us to overcome our own lower nature.

This is why the path of Yudhisthira is the more difficult path. It is the path of our ideals. It is the path of Dharma. Only someone with a much higher shuddhi of citta can discern Dharma at such a subtle level amidst immense hardship.

We find a parallel to Yudhisthira's conduct in the encounter between Vashishtha and Vishwamitra. Even after repeated transgressions by Vishwamitra, Vashishtha does not retaliate in kind. Struck by immense grief after the loss of his sons, Vashishtha still does not curse Vishwamitra. Such restraint is repeatedly advised and exemplified throughout our Itihasas.

It is this commitment to restraint and fidelity to Dharma that makes many of Yudhisthira's decisions so difficult for modern readers to accept. For me, the hardest was his agreeing to return to Hastinapura for the second game of dice.

By this point, the Pandavas had already lost everything once. They had been released only by Dhritarashtra's own conscience-stricken intervention. And now Yudhisthira, hearing Dhritarashtra's second summons, walked back in.

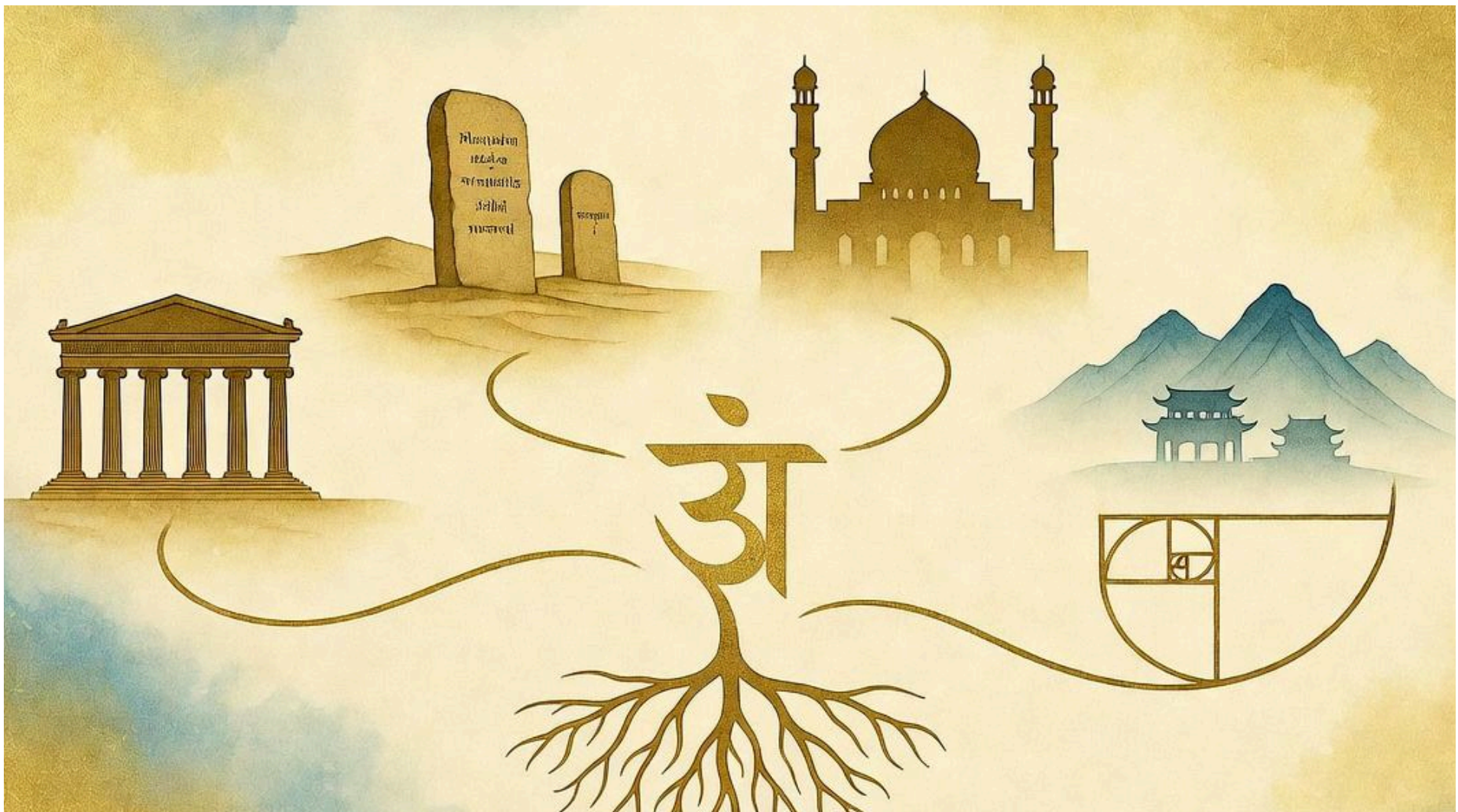
This doubt was resolved for me only after reflecting on the conduct of Purushottama Rama. It is only when we understand Rama that we can truly understand Yudhisthira. Rama accepted a harsh exile so that his father could keep his word. Reverence for elders and honouring their word have always been regarded as important expressions of Dharma in our tradition. Therefore, when Dhritarashtra, a father figure, summoned Yudhisthira once again for the game of dice, he could not refuse. This was reinforced by his own

understanding that accepting a challenge to a game of dice was part of Kshatriya Dharma.

Yudhisthira's conduct exemplifies an ideal deeply celebrated in our tradition. Like Rama, he places Dharma above personal comfort. Perhaps that is why Yudhisthira is not an easy character to admire. But it is precisely for that reason that our tradition remembers him not merely as a king, but as Dharmaraja.

We will continue exploring Yudhisthira's conversations throughout the Mahabharata in the upcoming parts.





CIVILIZATION AND HISTORY | AMRITANSHU PANDEY

Towards a Karmic Scale of Civilizations

Every civilization is a measurement. Of the size of its armies, the grandeur of its monuments, the spread of its trade networks, the sophistication of its legal codes. The Greeks measured by reason, the Romans by law, the modern world by GDP and democratic index scores. Each measurement system reveals something real, but arguably none of them reveal what matters most.

The Kardashev scale, proposed by Soviet astrophysicist Nikolai Kardashev in 1964, reached for something both cosmic and yet utterly material. It ranked civilizations by their capacity to harness energy - the home planet first, then the home star, then the galaxy. A civilization that can consume the full output of its sun is a Type 2 civilization, one that harnesses the energy of an entire galaxy, Type 3. The scale is elegant in its ambition, even if humanity currently hovers barely above Type 0, the Kardashev scale asks - how much of the material universe can a civilization command?

Here I propose a different question - how much of the soul, or ātman, can a civilization liberate? At the very least, in what way can it facilitate the journey?

Any civilization that denies the ātman's existence will not ask the second question. It will pursue Kardashev's horizon with tremendous energy, marshaling technology, capital, and collective will

toward the mastery of matter. And it may succeed. It may reach the stars. But the souls within it will remain unaddressed, cycling through incarnations with no maps, no vocabulary, no metaphysical infrastructure for understanding what is happening to them and why. Perhaps it will see waves of new age religions rise and fall across the long eons, for even with the external cosmos mastered, it leaves the internal one neglected.

So I propose a Karmic Scale of Civilizations. An assertion that the measure of a civilization's true advancement is the degree to which it facilitates the soul's journey toward liberation - toward moksha, the dissolution of karmic bondage. A civilization that sends its citizens to the stars while leaving their karmic architecture primitive has merely moved fast in the wrong direction.

Preliminary Schema

Before proposing specific tiers, the scale requires a theoretical foundation. What exactly are we measuring? This becomes clearer when we understand a requisite fundamental - we take karma and punarjanma as real, authentic ontological categories.

Karma, from the root √kr meaning "to do" or "to make," is the cosmic law of cause and effect, or

rather a mesh layer of ripples and ruptures. Each intentional action creates an impression - a samskara - within the subtle fabric of the jiva, the individual soul. These impressions accumulate across lifetimes, shaping tendencies, attracting circumstances, determining the quality of future incarnations. Karma is the mechanism by which consciousness evolves, the grammar through which the soul learns. A civilization that understands this creates radically different institutions than one that does not.

The soul's journey, in the dharmic model, spans many lifetimes. The jiva carries its karmic inheritance from one embodiment to the next, the way a seed carries the genetic memory of the plant it will become. Both are transitions within a vast evolutionary arc that the Hindu tradition calls samsara - the wheel of becoming. The goal of this arc is moksha - liberation from the wheel itself, the return of individuated consciousness to its source in Brahman. This is the telos, the final cause, toward which all genuine civilizational effort should point.

A civilization that does not know about this telos will not aim at it. A civilization that actively denies it will work against it. A civilization that partially glimpses it will achieve partial results. Only a civilization that has developed a comprehensive metaphysics of karma, rebirth, and liberation - and institutionalized that understanding in its ritual, philosophy, law, and social architecture - can be said to be fully aligned with the soul's evolutionary requirements. This gives us a set of variables to measure, or at least qualitatively appraise conditions on. Importantly, the scale dimensions must be global - ie, they can be applied across traditions without prejudicing the outcome toward any particular cultural form.

In this preliminary proposal, I list 10 dimensions as foundational. They constitute the karmic architecture of a civilization -

1. Ontological Openness

Asks whether the tradition can accommodate multiple views of reality simultaneously. A civilization that insists on one metaphysical truth and treats all others as heresy or error creates a closed system. The soul's evolution will require different ontological frameworks at different stages of its development. A tradition that can hold this multiplicity without collapsing into either relativism or rigidity scores highest.

2. Rebirth Logic

Asks whether the civilization acknowledges karmic continuity across lifetimes. A civilization that denies rebirth cuts off the entire mechanism by which karma operates across time. Without reincarnation, karma becomes merely a this-life accounting system, stripped of its evolutionary depth. Whether the civilization has a rudimentary afterlife concept, an explicit rebirth doctrine, or a fully articulated metaphysics of the between-life state - these determine where it lands on this dimension.

3. Ritual Density

Asks whether the civilization's ritual practices are performative or genuinely transformational. Ritual, properly understood, is consciousness technology. The Vedic yagya operates on subtle energetic levels - transformational at the level of samskara, operating on the actual fabric of karmic patterning. A tradition that has reduced ritual to social performance has lost something irreplaceable. A tradition that preserves ritual's transformational function - where samskara rites, diksha ceremonies, and festival cycles actually alter consciousness and purify karma - scores highest.

4. Soul Agency

Asks whether a civilization honors the individual soul's unique evolutionary path. A civilization that enforces conformity to a single prescribed path denies the reality of svadharma - the distinct dharmic trajectory appropriate to each soul's karmic stage. The soul in an early evolutionary phase requires different conditions than one approaching liberation. A civilization wise enough to recognize this difference, and flexible enough to accommodate it, is a more capable karmic vessel.

5. Ethical Nuance

Asks whether morality is contextualized within evolutionary understanding or enforced as absolute commandment. The dharmic tradition's insight here is that right action depends on who is acting, at what stage of development, under what circumstances, and toward what evolutionary end. Dharmic ethics are contextual - moral precision operating within evolutionary understanding.

6. Metaphysical Depth

Asks how detailed the civilization's map of consciousness actually is. Does it recognize subtle bodies? Multiple planes of existence? The mechanics of death, the between-life state, the

descent and ascent of embodiments? A civilization with a rich, empirically grounded map of consciousness - developed through millennia of systematic inner exploration - can guide souls through territory that less developed traditions cannot even acknowledge exists, even into realms (lokas) beyond this, the material bhuloka.

Integration of Eros and Death asks how the civilization relates to desire and mortality - the two great forces that most directly shape karmic accumulation. A civilization that treats desire as sin and death as punishment creates karmic distortions. One that understands desire as divine energy requiring direction rather than suppression, and death as transition requiring understanding rather than fear, creates the conditions for genuine transformation.

Divine Accessibility asks whether the individual soul can access divine consciousness directly. Civilizations that require institutional intermediaries - that insist the divine speaks only through authorized prophets or priests, and that personal mystical experience is dangerous or forbidden - limit the soul's capacity to recognize its own nature. Civilizations that validate direct experience through multiple pathways score highest here.

Karmic Portability asks how the civilization understands consciousness's capacity to move between planes of existence, to transmit karmic learning, and to participate in collective karmic fields. A civilization whose cosmology includes only one plane of existence - this world plus a static heaven or hell - has a deeply constrained karmic architecture. One that maps the full spectrum of lokas, of subtle and causal dimensions, of the akasha in which karmic impressions are stored - this is a civilization capable of equipping souls for the full range of their journey.

Teleological Liberation is the final and in some ways most decisive dimension. Does the civilization offer complete liberation from karmic bondage as its ultimate goal? Or does it stop at reward and punishment, at heavenly rest, at harmonious social functioning? Only a civilization with a genuine moksha doctrine - one that understands liberation as the dissolution of the karmic mechanism itself, the recognition of the soul as Brahman - has set the soul's final destination correctly.

The Scale - Seven Types

With these dimensions established, a stratification becomes possible. The types below are an architectural assessment of karmic capacity, with no claim about political or social ranking. A civilization at Type 1 may be producing tremendous beauty, deep social solidarity, and genuine human flourishing by many measures. What it cannot do, structurally, is facilitate the soul's full evolutionary arc. The honest acknowledgment of this is itself an act of civilizational respect.

Type 0 - Avidyic Civilization - Karmic Amnesia

The term avidya means ignorance - specifically, the fundamental ignorance of one's own nature that the Vedantic tradition identifies as the root cause of all suffering. A Type 0 civilization has institutionalized this ignorance. It actively denies the soul's existence, reduces consciousness to neurological accident, treats karma as superstition, and offers technological acceleration as a substitute for spiritual development.

The modern secular-materialist paradigm is the clearest contemporary example. It is a civilization in which the most prestigious intellectual institutions categorically reject the ontological premises that would make karmic evolution intelligible. Consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter. Personal identity ends at death. The self is a narrative construction. This creates what can only be called negative karmic momentum. The souls within such a civilization are being actively miseducated about their own nature - stalled in their evolution and pushed in the wrong direction simultaneously. Each lifetime spent in such an environment requires additional lifetimes of unlearning before genuine karmic progress can resume.

The technological acceleration of the 21st century intensifies this. The reduction of persons to data profiles, of consciousness to computational patterns, of social belonging to algorithmic curation - these are metaphysical interventions, and they push in the wrong direction. A civilization that can build quantum computers while being unable to tell a soul what it is ranks at the very bottom of what matters.

Type 1 - Confessional-Monotheist Civilization - Karmic Foreclosure

At Type 1, we encounter civilizations that acknowledge the soul but permanently foreclose

its evolutionary possibilities through doctrinal architecture. The soul exists. God created it. It lives once. It is judged. It enters paradise or punishment for eternity.

The Islamic civilizational stream represents this type most purely. The theological structure is rigorous and internally consistent - tawhid (divine unity) is absolute, shirk (associating partners with God) is the unforgivable sin, and the entire arc of existence is compressed into a single lifetime bookended by creation and judgment. To be clear, this architecture can produce achievements - in mathematics, architecture, jurisprudence, devotional intensity. Within its premises, it can produce real results.

The karmic problem is structural. There is no mechanism for multi-life evolution. The soul cannot carry learning from one incarnation to the next because there are no next incarnations. Karmic refinement cannot occur across time because time, for each soul, is a single event. The architecture is vertically intense but horizontally flat. The divine is absolutely transcendent, the soul absolutely created, and the distance between them is bridged only by correct submission, never by developmental merger. A soul deeply patterned by many lifetimes in this stream will find its evolutionary vocabulary severely constrained. The questions it needs to ask - What karma am I working through? What did I carry into this birth? What evolutionary stage am I at? - have no purchase within the metaphysical grammar it has been given. The ceiling is civilizational architecture, not personal failure.

Type 2 - Covenantal Civilization - Karmic Stasis

Christianity and Judaism occupy this tier. Both represent significant advances over Type 1 - the divine is more accessible, the ethical framework more nuanced, the relationship between soul and God more dynamic and developmental. The Jewish tradition especially has developed remarkable capacities for sustained moral reflection, covenantal relationship, and the holding of paradox.

But both remain fundamentally committed to a single-life paradigm with binary judgment. The Christian soul, whatever the richness of the mystical traditions within Christianity, is ultimately headed for heaven or hell. The kabbalistic tradition gestures toward reincarnation (gilgul) in some streams, but this remains peripheral rather than central to the architecture. The mainstream

current of both traditions stops the karmic mechanism at death. This creates stasis. The soul can deepen within a lifetime. It can develop ethical refinement, spiritual sensitivity, genuine love for the divine. But it cannot carry the learning forward in the way the karmic model requires. Each soul begins fresh, equipped only with the genetic and cultural inheritance of its single birth. The vast repository of multi-life samskara remains inaccessible, unmapped, and unexplained by the tradition's metaphysics.

The absence of karma theory also distorts the traditions' understanding of suffering. Why does an innocent child suffer? Why do the wicked prosper? These questions remain, within the single-life paradigm, genuinely unresolvable. The dharmic tradition does not need to appeal to divine mystery here. The answer is karmic inheritance - the unfolding of causes set in motion across a much longer arc than a single lifetime can display.

Type 3 - Spirit-Ecological Civilization - Karmic Balancing

Ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, Greek philosophical, and indigenous traditions worldwide occupy this tier. These are civilizations that have broken beyond the single-life binary and entered into genuine relationship with subtle dimensions of existence. The Egyptian Book of the Dead maps posthumous consciousness states in remarkable detail. Greek mystery traditions, from Eleusis to the Orphic schools, preserve teachings on rebirth and the soul's journey through the underworld. Indigenous traditions across the planet maintain intricate knowledge of ancestral presence, spirit communication, and the soul's passage between states.

What these traditions share is a sense of the soul embedded in a living cosmos - the natural world as participant in the soul's development. The karmic mechanism is recognized in its ecological dimension - human action has consequences not only in human social space but also in the subtle fabric of the world itself. Right relationship with land, ancestor, and spirit maintains karmic balance, violation disrupts it. The limitation at this tier is the absence of a comprehensive liberation framework. These traditions balance karma rather than transcending it. They seek harmonious cycling rather than cessation of the cycle itself. Moksha is not on the map. The cosmic householder is maintained in good standing, the path beyond householding remains unmarked.

There is much to honor here. The soul that has spent lifetimes in indigenous or ancient pagan streams carries a sensitivity to subtle dimensions that more abstract traditions often lose. The price is that the evolutionary arc extends rather than concludes.

Type 4 - Taoic Civilization - Karmic Refinement

Classical Taoism, Chan and Zen Buddhism, and the Confucian hybrid civilizations of East Asia represent a quantum advance. Here the emphasis shifts from relationship with cosmic forces to alignment with cosmic pattern. The Tao - the underlying flow of reality - cannot be defined, commanded, or personified. It can only be recognized and moved with. The sage moves with the Tao - alignment, attunement, effortless harmonization with what already is.

This produces a karmic architecture of elegant economy. There is no need for elaborate cosmological scaffolding because the emphasis is on the immediate - what is the quality of this attention, this breath, this action? The Confucian understanding of li - ritual propriety as the precise enactment of harmonious relationship - is a well-developed ethical framework. When Confucius teaches his disciples to perform mourning rites with exact attention, he is teaching karmic hygiene in the most practical sense.

The Taoic streams are mostly misunderstood in Western assessment, which tends to read their minimalism as primitiveness, or as a superficially material trend. The opposite is true. The Zen master who can transmit dharma in a single gesture, the Taoist sage who acts from wu wei - effortless action in perfect alignment with the Tao - has achieved something the voluminous theology of other traditions labors toward without reaching.

The limitation is the absence of explicit moksha doctrine. Liberation, in the Taoic sense, is harmonious dissolution - the drop returning to the river rather than the wave recognizing itself as ocean. The individual karmic arc is refined to exquisite subtlety, but the final transcendence of the karmic mechanism itself is not mapped.

Type 5 - Dharmic-Renunciate Civilization - Karmic Ascent

Jainism, early Buddhism, and the nastika (non-Vedic) schools of Indian philosophy reach Type 5. Here we have, for the first time, civilizational architectures that explicitly map karma and rebirth as the central problem, develop detailed

analyses of karmic mechanisms, and prescribe specific practices for the systematic transcendence of karmic bondage.

The Jain contribution is extraordinary. The Jain analysis of karma - its types, subtypes, the precise mechanisms by which it adheres to the soul, and the equally precise methods by which it is shed through tapas (austerity) and non-attachment - gives rigorous treatments to the karmic mechanism. The Buddhist Abhidhamma tradition is similarly meticulous, mapping states of consciousness with a precision that modern neuroscience is only beginning to approach from its very different direction. What these traditions have is methodological clarity about liberation. The path to nirvana or moksha runs through the systematic dismantling of the karmic mechanism through disciplined practice - not through faith, grace, or correct belief. This is civilizational architecture calibrated for liberation.

The limitation at this tier - which separates it from the apex - is the absence of what the Vaishnava tradition calls rasa. The renunciate path achieves liberation through withdrawal from engagement. But the dharmic insight at its fullest understands that the universe itself is lila - divine play - and that liberation does not require the soul to exit the cosmic game but to recognize its true nature while fully within it. The devotion, the dance, the beauty, the divine relationship - these are pathways through liberation, integral to its fullest realization.

Type 6 - Sanatana Dharma - Karmic Transcendence

At the apex of the scale stands Sanatana Dharma - the eternal dharma - which the Hindu tradition has simply intuited, sustained, and preserved - not invented. The claim is metaphysical - that these teachings correspond to the actual structure of reality, to the way karma, consciousness, rebirth, and liberation actually work, independent of any particular culture's preferences.

The architecture at this level is comprehensive. Every dimension of karmic architecture scores at its highest. Rebirth is central and extensively mapped. Karma is understood with technical precision across its three phases - sanchita (accumulated), prarabdha (activated), agami (newly created). The panchakosa model maps the soul's vehicles from gross to subtle to causal. The trishira doctrine explains what travels between lifetimes and what dissolves. The bardo-equivalent states - the antarabhava between death and rebirth - are described in texts from the Upanishads

through later Puranic elaboration.

Liberation - moksha - arrives as a family of doctrines, each calibrated to a different understanding of ultimate reality. The Advaita school understands liberation as the recognition of jiva's identity with Brahman. The Vishishtadvaita understands it as the soul's eternal participation in the divine body of Ishvara. The Dvaita school preserves the individual soul's eternal distinctness even in liberation, maintaining the devotional relationship that bhakti considers the highest good. These are different articulations of a reality too vast for any single conceptual system, offered to souls at different stages of their journey.

The pathways to liberation are multiple and valid simultaneously. Gyana yoga approaches through discriminative knowledge. Bhakti yoga through the transmutation of desire into divine love. Karma yoga through action without egoic ownership of results. Raja yoga through systematic inward attention. Each path suits different temperamental types and karmic configurations. A civilization that can hold all of these as genuine routes to the same destination, without insisting on hierarchical ranking among them, has achieved something extraordinary.

Sanatana Dharma is the only civilizational stream in which the metaphysics of the soul, the mechanism of karma, and the technology of liberation have been developed into a mutually consistent, internally coherent, and practically applicable architecture spanning the full range of human temperament and evolutionary stage.

The divine is equally available as personal Ishvara and impersonal Brahman. Ritual is consciousness technology. the soul has genuine agency within its karmic arc, ethics are contextual and evolutionary. Multiple planes of existence are mapped with precision. Desire and death are integrated, direct mystical experience is validated and transmitted through living lineages.

The scale is architectural assessment. A structure built to specific purposes can be evaluated by how well it serves those purposes. If the purpose is the soul's liberation across multiple lifetimes, Sanatana Dharma's architecture is the most complete we have.

The Scale as Diagnosis

We formulate this scale as an experimental diagnostic. The aim here isn't chauvinistic or triumphalist. A civilization's position on it tells us

how well the civilization equips the souls within it for their evolutionary journey - nothing about the worth of those souls, or what they have achieved by other measures.

What the scale reveals, among other things, is the profound karmic cost of the last couple of millennia, and particularly the recent centuries. Colonial expansion spread the Type 1 and Type 2 metaphysical frameworks across regions that had been, in some cases, at Type 3, Type 4, or Type 5. Forced conversion did not simply change religious affiliation. It disrupted the karmic infrastructure through which entire populations had been navigating their soul journeys for generations. The dharmic streams of Southeast Asia, partially overwritten by Islam. The indigenous traditions of the Americas, largely destroyed by Christian civilization. The sophisticated animist traditions of Africa, suppressed and shamed. These are civilizational violations of the soul's evolutionary requirements - their cultural dimension the smaller part of the damage done.

The scale also diagnoses the modern crisis with precision. The global spread of the Type 0 materialist paradigm - through educational systems, media, and the prestige economy of secular science - has produced what might be called a civilizational karmic emergency. We may well propose this as an addition to the idea of the global meta-crises, or the polycrisis. Billions of souls are incarnating into environments that actively deny the reality of their own nature. The hunger for meaning that drives the modern spiritual marketplace - the yoga studios, the mindfulness apps, the new-age renaissance, the persistent fascination with near-death experiences - is the soul recognizing its deprivation and seeking remedy.

The souls are following their nature, but the civilizational architectures are failing them.

Now, a scale without practical application remains abstract. The Karmic Scale of Civilizations offers several points of practical leverage.

For civilizational analysis, it provides a framework that goes where Kardashev cannot. Economic productivity, military capacity, and scientific output are captured by existing scales. Karmic architecture is captured by none of them. The scale allows us to ask, for any civilization at any historical moment, whether its metaphysical infrastructure is advancing or retreating. Think of it this way - even when we become a Type 3

Kardashev civilization, the ranking gives us no information on the quality of human lives at that level. And of what use is it really, in such a case? Whether we live on one planet, conquer the solar system, or build a Dyson sphere around our galactic center, the most vital investigations will still revolve around the question - are people living prosperous, fulfilled lives that reward a teleological culmination?

For cultural policy, particularly in India, where the world's oldest continuously functional Type 6 civilization faces persistent pressure from Type 0 modernity and Type 1 and 2 Abrahamic influence, the scale offers a vocabulary for defending something that resists defense in the terms modernity provides.

When the question is asked why India should maintain its dharmic traditions rather than modernizing fully, the usual answers - cultural heritage, identity, social cohesion - are insufficient. The deeper answer is karmic - these traditions carry irreplaceable metaphysical infrastructure that cannot be reconstructed once lost. The architectural blueprints are the living traditions themselves.

For individual souls navigating the bewildering plurality of available spiritual traditions, the scale offers orientation. Not every tradition is equally equipped to serve every soul's evolutionary stage. The soul drawn to Advaita Vedanta after lifetimes in a covenantal tradition is following its evolutionary gradient toward a more comprehensive karmic architecture. The scale makes this intelligible.

The obvious objection to the scale is that it ranks civilizations, and ranking civilizations is the beginning of the logic that justified conquest and colonization. The objection would be right if the scale were measuring civilization's right to dominate others. It measures no such thing. A higher ranking on the Karmic Scale confers greater obligation to preserve, transmit, and make accessible the karmic architecture that makes the ranking possible. It confers no right to impose. Sanatana Dharma, which scores at the apex of the scale, has historically been among the least coercive of the world's civilizational traditions. The architectural comprehensiveness that earns it the highest ranking also includes, structurally, the recognition of multiple valid paths - which produces tolerance rather than crusade.

The scale is also preliminary. These ten dimensions

and seven types are initial proposals. The placement of specific traditions will invite legitimate debate. Sub-types and intermediate cases will emerge on closer examination. The point is to begin the conversation with a framework serious enough to do justice to what is actually at stake.

The soul's journey is the longest journey. A civilization that takes it seriously is the most advanced civilization there is. Everything else is just velocity.



Anveshi

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Karnataka has been called the laboratory of Hindu temple architecture. And Badami is one of its greatest centers where the origin and evolution of temple architecture can be traced. Located in Bagalkot district of northern Karnataka, in the famed Deccan it is a great Hindu cultural center. Badami, along with Pattadakallu, Aihole and Mahakoota creates an ensemble which displays a wide variety of temples. The seat of the great Badami Chalukyas, Badami has one of the earliest cave temples of India, in which Hindu iconography touches some of its greatest heights. But it does not stop at cave temples and the evolution can be seen in the later temples around the lake.

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Big Questions

Under our Big Questions initiative, we ask provocative questions about some of the most fundamental problems and open questions that Hindu society faces today. Issues that are not settled, questions that are perennially asked by every Hindu generation, and novel dilemmas that we face today.

Big Question 2026 - Is Hindu Unity Compatible With Indian Diversity?

Would an overarching Hindu unity destroy, or lessen the diversity that exists in India? Or is Hindu unity compatible with Indian diversity? Will unity lead to the destruction of all diversity? Can diversity survive standalone without uniting forces? Or is there a third path? This big question goes deep into all these questions and brings to you answers from many different stakeholders.



This Big Question 2026 is made possible by the generous support of Shri Hari Kiran Vadlamani, the founder of coHari. We are grateful to him for his patronage.

See all Big Questions at our website- www.bodharesearch.in/big-questions

Civilization Theory - Dhatus as Civilizational Code

Civilizations encode an understanding of reality in their languages, and Sanskrit encodes beginning with the verb root, the dhatu. This course takes eight dhatu-pairs and builds outward from each - from etymology to concept to civilizational implication, revealing Sanskrit as the source code of Bharata's civilizational operating system.

We just concluded our 8 session course on using Sanskrit as a civilizational source code - the operating system. To read the dhatus correctly is to read the operating system of Bharata. This course took that claim seriously across eight sessions traced from the verbal root to the concept it generated, to the civilizational architecture it produced.

About Bodha

Bodha is a think tank and research group, focused on contemporary issues of cultural concern, to inform core areas of policy with wisdom drawn from Hindu traditions. We advance intellectual churn within the Hindu renaissance, and curate cultural experiences of core Hindu institutions such as the temple.

Our Verticals

Research

To illuminate hidden universal forces and long arcs in foreign and public policy; to reveal the design of core Hindu institutions like the temple, gurukula, family, and charity; and to turn the social sciences lens with a Hindu view, Bodha engages in focused research projects. These projects combine deep and immersive field research with rigorous theorization based on core cultural ideas.

Anveshi

Guideds tour of four to five days to beautiful and hitherto unexplored temples and kshetras of Bharatavarsha. Anveshi tours are full of architectural, sculptural and cultural splendor, and also an immersion into living systems carrying beautiful cultural traditions for thousands of years.

Bodha Academy

Modern fault lines in Hindu society stem from an identity crisis manufactured by the British, by institutionalizing identity-based fault lines through academia and other institutions. At Bodha, we address this by training scholars every year in anthropology and sociology from an Indic point of view.

The Big Questions

Every year we will formulate big questions stating major problems that capture core concerns in the contemporary journey of Hindu society, and put those questions to great thinkers, leaders and activists. The Big Questions vertical will seek answers which will move the needle towards solving the stated problems.

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