

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
PEER REVIEWEDREVISITING DHARMA THROUGH FEMINIST LENS: ETHICS, DUTY AND
GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN THOUGHT

Aratrika Basu

Abstract

This paper, *Revisiting Dharma through a Feminist Lens: Ethics, Duty and Gender in Contemporary Indian Thought*, reinterprets the concept of *dharma* as a dynamic and evolving moral framework beyond its patriarchal codifications. Tracing *dharma*'s historical evolution from its Vedic roots in cosmic harmony (*ṛta*) to its institutionalization in the *Dharmaśāstras*, the study examines how gendered interpretations, particularly *strī-dharma*, reduced women's moral agency to obedience and service. Drawing on feminist philosophers such as Uma Chakravarti, Nivedita Menon, Rita Gross, and Gayatri Spivak, alongside Western thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Carol Gilligan, and Nel Noddings, the paper argues for a feminist reclamation of *dharma* grounded in care, autonomy, and relational ethics. It explores how such reinterpretation transforms *dharma* from a hierarchical duty into an inclusive moral consciousness that values empathy, equality and is gender sensitive. Engaging also with Indian thinkers like Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Vivekananda, Ambedkar and Vandana Shiva, the paper situates feminist *dharma* within broader humanist and ecological ethics. Ultimately, it proposes a feminist *dhārmic* ethics—a synthesis of tradition and transformation—that restores *dharma*'s original ethical vitality while aligning it with contemporary ideals of justice, compassion, and human flourishing.

Keywords: Dharma, Feminist philosophy, Ethics of care, Gender, Morality, Contemporary Indian Philosophy