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# Rajdharmā and Social Justice: A Study of Ved Vyasa's Mahabharata in the Context of Equality and Inclusivity

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the fundamental philosophical facets of Rajdharmā, as stated in the epic Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa. The study tries to uncover Vyasa's thoughts on social justice and their contemporary relevance by focusing on the topics of equality and inclusivity. The paper examines the concept of society structure, governance principles, and ethical considerations in Rajdharmā by examining its complexities. The analysis delves into Vyasa's critique of the caste system, his view on gender equality, and the economic and social inclusion mechanisms he suggests. The research aims to understand the theoretical foundations and practical implications of Rajdharmā in promoting a just and inclusive society through an in-depth examination of Vyasa's story. This study highlights the ongoing debate on governance ethics and social justice by linking ancient knowledge to contemporary issues in the pursuit of a harmonious and fair society order.*

**Keywords:** rajdharmā, Mahabharata, social justice, social justice.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Rajadharmā, or ruler's authority, and its influence on social justice is profoundly important in the context of ancient Indian philosophy. The Mahabharata, attributed to the sage Ved Vyasa, is a remarkable literary masterpiece that captures the essence of Rajadharmā and its social justice implications.<sup>2</sup>The Mahabharata is a comprehensive collection of instances and lessons that examine the complexity of royal duty and government, providing profound insights into societal principles of equality and inclusion. The epic introduces a wide range of individuals and delves into their complex relationships, presenting a sophisticated understanding of the various aspects of social justice. It provides a comprehensive overview of the societal situation that occurred throughout that period, in which the concepts of equality and inclusion are disregarded and violated. A careful examination of the Mahabharata reveals various viewpoints on justice, fairness, and rulers' ethical responsibility to their subjects. This investigation is

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<sup>2</sup> Narayan, R. and Laxman, R. (1979). The Mahabharata: a shortened modern prose version of the Indian epic. World Literature Today, 53(2), 347. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40133818>

critical in examining the complex relationship between Rajadharma and social justice.

The Mahabharata's significance in the present discourse on social justice cannot be emphasized. The ethical and moral dilemmas faced by the characters in the epic are related to contemporary difficulties, making the work a timeless source of contemplation and introspection. Exploring the Mahabharata can provide significant insights into the ideals that lead to a just and equitable society that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. I intend to conduct a comprehensive study of Rajadharma and social justice in the Mahabharata in this research paper, examining the timeless wisdom embodied in this epic. I attempt to uncover the intricate relationship between Rajadharma and social justice, with a particular focus on equality and diversity, through a meticulous analysis of the characters, their actions, and the ethical dilemmas they face. This study seeks to shed light on the epic's enduring significance in forming our understanding of governance, ethics, and societal harmony by combining Mahabharata teachings with contemporary discourses on social justice.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **(A) Rajdharma**

Rajadharma, depicted in the Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa, is a complex understanding of governance, justice, and societal harmony. Rajadharma is inextricably linked to the broader concept of social justice, highlighting the sage's profound insights into rulers' ethical responsibilities and the principles that lead to a just and equitable society. The Mahabharata is a collection of wisdom, presenting various moral and ethical issues faced by the characters and thus providing profound insights into the principles of governance and societal harmony. Rajadharma, as defined by Ved Vyasa, is a comprehensive approach to justice that includes distributive justice, institutional justice, and spatial justice.<sup>3</sup> Through its narrative and teachings, the Mahabharata provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of social justice. It depicts instances in which the principles of equality and inclusivity are both upheld and violated, providing a comprehensive picture of the societal dynamics prevalent at the time. Ved Vyasa's portrayal of Rajadharma shows a deep understanding of the complexities of justice and rulers' ethical responsibilities to their subjects. This investigation is crucial in examining the epic's intricate connection between Rajadharma and social justice. Furthermore, the Mahabharata's enduring significance in contemporary social justice discourse cannot be questioned. The ethical and moral dilemmas encountered by the characters in the epic resonate

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<sup>3</sup> Buettner-Schmidt, K. and Lobo, M. (2011). Social justice: a concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 68(4), 948-958. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2011.05856.x>

with contemporary dilemmas, resulting in the text being a timeless source of contemplation and introspection. Ved Vyasa's concept of Rajadharma offers valuable insights into the principles that lead to a prosperous and equitable society across time and culture. The Mahabharata's teachings and narratives continue to inform our understanding of governance, ethics, and societal harmony, making it a timeless and valuable resource for understanding the complexities of justice and governance. Finally, Ved Vyasa's portrayal of Rajadharma in the Mahabharata provides a comprehensive and timeless understanding of governance, justice, and societal harmony.

Ved Vyasa's depiction of Rajadharma in the Mahabharata provides a comprehensive and timeless understanding of governance, justice, and societal harmony. Rajadharma is more than just governance; it is a comprehensive approach to justice that encompasses equitable justice, institutional justice, and spatial justice. The Mahabharata's enduring significance in contemporary social justice discourse emphasizes the timeless wisdom encapsulated in this epic, making it an indispensable resource for understanding the complexities of justice and governance.

### **(B) Concepts of Social Justice in Mahabharata**

In the Mahabharata, the concept of social justice is intricately woven into the narrative, reflecting a multifaceted understanding of ethics, governance, and societal harmony. The epic explores a rich collection of characters and moral dilemmas, providing profound insights into the principles that support a just and equitable society. Karna, who has been mistreated from a social standpoint and of relative deprivation, embodies the complexities of social justice, highlighting the challenges faced by marginalized and disenfranchised individuals<sup>4</sup>. The Mahabharata's depiction of Karna's struggles emphasizes the ethical dimensions of social justice, shedding light on societal injustices. Furthermore, the Mahabharata focuses on individuals' and rulers' ethical responsibilities, highlighting the importance of ethics in making life meaningful at the individual, group, and societal levels<sup>5</sup>. The epic emphasizes the inherent connection between ethics and societal well-being, advocating for the preservation of natural resources in order to promote environmental justice<sup>6</sup>. For instance, Mahabharata's narratives,

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<sup>4</sup> Bharathi, S. and Manjula, K. T. (2021). Re-inventing Karna of the Mahabharata with a renewed perspective- a review of literature. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences*, 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.47992/ijmts.2581.6012.0154>

<sup>5</sup> Manikutty, S. (2012). Why should i be ethical? some answers from Mahabharata. *Journal of Human Values*, 18(1), 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097168581101800103>

<sup>6</sup> Praveena, T. and Raju, R. L. N. (2023). Achieving environmental harmony: an analysis based on the narratives from mahabharata. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(2), 441-446. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1302.19>

particularly the Anusasana Parva, offer valuable insights into the ethical and moral imperatives of environmental conservation, demonstrating the epic's enduring relevance in contemporary discourses on environmental justice. In addition, the Mahabharata engages in a deep debate on issues of justice, highlighting the complexities of ethical decision-making and the challenges that its characters face.<sup>7</sup> Krishna, who is frequently portrayed as a trickster figure challenging the conventional ethical code of the time, embodies the epic's nuanced understanding of ethics and morality<sup>8</sup>. The portrayal of Krishna in the Mahabharata emphasizes the diverse nature of ethical sensibilities and the complexities of ethical decision-making within the narrative. The Bhagavad Gita, a part of the Mahabharata, is a dialogue about ethical dilemmas and moral philosophies, providing profound insights into the complexities of ethical decision-making and moral behaviour<sup>9</sup>. The epic presents an understanding of warfare ethics, recognizing the inevitability of compromise and the complexities of ethical conduct in the context of war.<sup>10</sup> The Mahabharata's portrayal of warfare ethics reflects the epic's commitment to the complexities of ethical decision-making and the moral dilemmas inherent in conflict.

Finally, the Mahabharata provides a comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of social justice, ethics, and morality, demonstrating the epic's continued relevance in contemporary discourses on justice and governance. The Mahabharata's narratives and characters offer profound insights into the ethical responsibilities of individuals and rulers, the complexities of environmental justice, and the nuances of ethical decision-making in the context of war, making it a valuable resource for understanding the complexities of social justice and ethical conduct.

### **(C) Ved Vyasa's Commentary on Society and Governance**

Vyasa's observations and commentary on the current socio-political environment in the Mahabharata provide valuable insights into the complexities of governance, power dynamics, and societal norms during that period. The epic, attributed to Vyasa, contains a rich tapestry of narratives and teachings that delve into the multifaceted nature of the sociopolitical landscape, reflecting the sage's profound insights into rulers' ethical responsibilities and the principles that underpin a just and equitable society. Vyasa's observations in the Mahabharata provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-political environment that existed during the time.

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<sup>7</sup> Vanita, R. (2022). The dharma of justice in the Sanskrit Epics. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192859822.001.0001>

<sup>8</sup> Chatterji, R. (2015). Comic gags and the Mahabharata war. *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 1(2), 127-146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2393861715583788>

<sup>9</sup> Simha, A. (2022). Amanitvam: a concept from the Bhagavat Gita applicable in medical ethics. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 49(10), 723-724. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jme-2022-108652>

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, J. and Rey, J. (2021). Mitigating the horrors of war. *War and Religion: A Very Short Introduction*, 57-C4.F3. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198803218.003.0004>

By situating ritual activity in specific cosmic, social, and spatial contexts, the narrativized rituals of the Mahabharata concretize, socialize, and provide an interpretive arena for the progressive “dhrmatization” of early South Asian religious discourse.<sup>11</sup> This reflects Vyasa’s profound understanding of the interconnectedness of religious, social, and spatial dimensions within the sociopolitical context, shedding light on the complexities of governance and societal harmony. Furthermore, the Mahabharata’s transformation of female characters from suppression to supremacy reflects Vyasa’s commentary on the changing socio-political dynamics and the changing status of women within the narrative.<sup>12</sup> The stories of the Mahabharata, which are deeply rooted in Indian culture, remain relevant today, highlighting Vyasa’s observations on the enduring relevance of socio-political themes within the epic. The Mahabharata’s symbolic representation of Vyasa encompasses the collective wisdom and contributions of anonymous poets who contributed to the epic’s composition, highlighting the sage’s profound insights into the socio-political milieu prevalent at the time.<sup>13</sup>

This emphasizes Vyasa’s role in the Mahabharata's sociopolitical narratives and commentary, which provide valuable insights into the complexities of governance, power dynamics, and societal norms. According to Vyasa, the Mahabharata’s narratives and commentaries provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-political milieu, reflecting the sage’s profound insights into rulers’ ethical responsibilities and the principles that underpin a just and equitable society. Furthermore, the epic’s narratives and commentaries provide a comprehensive and timeless understanding of governance, justice, and societal harmony, making it an invaluable resource for understanding the complexities of that time’s socio-political landscape. In conclusion, Vyasa’s observations and commentaries in the Mahabharata provide profound insights into the socio-political context of the time, reflecting the sage’s keen understanding of governance, power dynamics, and societal norms. The Mahabharata’s enduring significance in contemporary discourses on governance and societal harmony emphasizes the timeless wisdom embodied in Vyasa’s observations and commentaries.

### **III. EQUALITY IN RAJDHARMA**

Equality has been an important theme in Rajdharmā. For instance, Vyasa’s critique of the caste system in the Mahabharata reflects the sage's keen understanding of the interconnectedness of

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<sup>11</sup> Hegarty, J. (2009). On palatial imagination in the Sanskrit Mahabharata. *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 13(2), 163-187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-009-9074-3>

<sup>12</sup> Parinitha, B. and Lourdasamy, A. (2022). The evolution of the female from suppression to supremacy in the select novels of postmodern retellings of the epic- a review of literature. *International Journal of Management, Technology, and Social Sciences*, 163-183. <https://doi.org/10.47992/ijmts.2581.6012.0184>

<sup>13</sup> Jadhav, D. (2018). On the value implied in the data referred to in the Mahabharata for π. *Vidyottama Sanatana: International Journal of Hindu Science and Religious Studies*, 2(1), 18. <https://doi.org/10.25078/ijhsrs.v2i1.511>

religious, social, and spatial dimensions within the sociopolitical milieu, shedding light on the complexities of governance and societal harmony. In the context of Rajdharma, Vyasa's critique of the caste system and its implications for social equality highlights the epic's enduring significance in contemporary discourses regarding justice, ethics, and governance. Vyasa's observations and commentaries in the Mahabharata provide profound insights into the socio-political context of the time, highlighting the sage's keen understanding of governance, power dynamics, and societal norms. The epic's continued relevance in contemporary discourses on governance and societal harmony highlights the timeless wisdom embodied in Vyasa's observations and commentary. Furthermore, the Mahabharata's portrayal of gender roles provides valuable insights into the complexities of societal norms and the implications for gender equality. In the epic, Vyasa's observations and commentary provide a comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics prevalent in the past. The Mahabharata's narratives and teachings shed light on the diverse nature of gender roles and the ethical responsibilities that come with them. Vyasa's nuanced portrayal of female characters in the epic demonstrates the extent to which gender equality is embedded in the concept of Rajadharma. Dandniti, the term used in Mahabharata, refers to the science of coercion. In the context, it is most likely to be the subject of governance. As the reins check the steed or as an iron hook controls an elephant, so dandniti keeps the world under constant pressure. It destroys every evil as the sun destroys the darkness. Bhishma asserts that if dandniti is destroyed, the three Vedas will disappear and the duties of the four varnas are well matched. In the aftermath of the destruction of dandniti and the instability of Rajadharma, all people suffer from numerous aversions. It is the duty of the king to be fully versed in dandnitis.

#### **IV. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF VED VYASA'S RAJDHARMA**

The Mahabharata's depiction of Ved Vyasa's Rajdharma transcends its historical and cultural origins, offering insights and principles that resonate with modern challenges in governance and societal order. Several aspects of Rajdharma are still relevant in the modern world. In Vyasa's Rajdharma, the importance of ethical leadership is highlighted. In an age of complex moral dilemmas, political controversies, and shifting social norms, the Mahabharata's guidance on righteous governance serves as a timeless guide for leaders navigating ethical challenges. Rajadharma's emphasis on inclusivity and social justice is aligned with contemporary expectations for egalitarian societies. Vyasa's critique of the caste system and advocacy for gender equality emphasizes the importance of dealing with contemporary issues of discrimination and social disparities. Moreover, rajdharma extends beyond human relationships to include environmental well-being. For instance, with growing global concerns about climate

change and environmental degradation, Vyasa's principles of responsible governance provide a comprehensive perspective that incorporates ecological sustainability into the fabric of leadership. The tension between tradition and innovation is a crucial element in a rapidly changing world. Vyasa's advice encourages leaders to navigate this conflict wisely, recognizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage while adapting to society's evolving needs. Through Rajdharma, the Mahabharata recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. This is consistent with current human rights discourses, which emphasize the protection of fundamental freedoms and the dignity of all individuals in society.

The Mahabharata is a narrative about conflict, and Vyasa's insights into conflict resolution and diplomacy are still relevant today. In today's geopolitical contexts, Rajdharma can inform strategies for peaceful dispute resolution and the promotion of dialogue over confrontation. Rajdharma provides a comprehensive framework for effective governance, including aspects such as transparency, accountability, and the pursuit of the common good. These principles are applied to modern governance structures that aim to increase public trust and well-being. The Mahabharata is rife with instances of leaders facing crises and dilemmas. Vyasa's advice on crisis decision-making, is based on principles of justice and justice, provides valuable insights for modern leaders navigating complex issues. In conclusion, Ved Vyasa's Rajdharma continues to be a source of wisdom with broad applications in modern governance. Its enduring significance stems from its ability to provide ethical guidelines, promote inclusivity, and address the diverse challenges that leaders face in today's diverse and diverse societies.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Ved Vyasa's Mahabharata provides valuable insights into the complexities of governance, power dynamics, and societal norms in the context of Rajadharma and social justice. However, it is essential to recognize Vyasa's Rajadharma's limitations in addressing certain aspects of social justice. The epic reflects its time's sociopolitical environment, which was characterized by hierarchical structures and gender disparities. Vyasa's vision for inclusive governance emphasizes the importance of social cohesion, which is inextricably linked to social capital and well-being.<sup>14</sup> It is highlighting the dimensions of societal cohesion, indicating that societies are experiencing a social cohesion crisis, highlighting the need for inclusive governance to address this issue. Vyasa's vision for inclusive governance recognizes the critical role of education in fostering societal cohesion, highlighting the importance of incorporating educational policies

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<sup>14</sup> Forrest, R. and Kearns, A. (2001). Social cohesion, social capital and the neighbourhood. *Urban Studies*, 38(12), 2125-2143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980120087081>



and practices into governance structures to promote inclusiveness and cohesion. Vyasa's Rajadharma vision is aligned with the concept of dignity-conserving care, which emphasizes the preservation of dignity in healthcare settings. This is similar to the concept of preserving individuals' inherent value within governance structures, ensuring that policies and practices are respected and safeguard the dignity of all members of society. As a result, Vyasa's Rajadharma can be viewed as a mechanism for ensuring that governance structures are sensitive to the needs of diverse populations, thus ensuring their inherent worth and dignity. Rajadharma can be considered as a framework that seeks to incorporate these characteristics within governance structures, ensuring that individuals' dignity is respected and respected in all societal interactions.

Moreover, Vyasa's Rajadharma upholds individuals' dignity and inherent worth as a core tenet by aligning with principles of dignity-conserving care, addressing the needs of conflict-affected populations, and emphasizing the attributes associated with dignity. Rajadharma promotes inclusive and respectful practices that honour the dignity of all individuals within society by incorporating these principles into governance structures. Although the Mahabharata contains profound wisdom, it also reflects the limitations of its time, such as the persistence of certain social inequalities and the reintegration of traditional gender roles. Vyasa's portrayal of Rajadharma may not fully address the complexities of attaining complete social equality and inclusivity. Although the epic's narrative provides valuable insights, it may not provide comprehensive solutions to all forms of social injustice prevalent in modern society. Vyasa's Rajadharma's limitations in addressing economic disparities, gender equality, and social inclusion highlight the need for a greater and more nuanced approach to social justice. To summarize, while Ved Vyasa's Mahabharata provides timeless wisdom and insights into the principles of governance and societal harmony, it is critical to recognize the limitations of its era as well as the complexities of achieving complete social justice. The portrayal of Rajadharma in the epic provides a basis for ethical reflection, but it may not fully address the numerous challenges of achieving a comprehensive social equality and inclusivity in modern societies. As a result, understanding Vyasa's Rajadharma critically and contextually is essential for implementing its principles to the challenges of modern social justice.

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