

RAJADHARMA AND ETHICAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIAN TRADITION

DHARMA • ETHICS • JUSTICE • LEADERSHIP • WISDOM • WELFARE



— ❖ — Dr. Harshvardhan Singh — ❖ —

Rajadharma
—•• and •—
Ethical Governance
— in —
Indian Tradition





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and
Ethical Governance
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Indian Tradition



Dr. Harshvardhan Singh

First Edition



BOOKSKART WORLD

New Delhi, India



2026

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Dr. Harshvardhan Singh

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ISBN: 978-81-995663-1-6

Publisher: BOOKSKART WORLD

Place of Publication: New Delhi, India

Year of Publication: 2026

Language: English

Format: Single-component retail product: Digital download and online

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Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, clarity, and scholarly responsibility. However, interpretations of ancient texts, governance traditions, philosophical ideas, and historical concepts may vary among scholars. Readers are encouraged to consult primary texts, standard translations, constitutional documents, and scholarly works for deeper study.

Suggested Citation:

Singh, H. (2026). *Rajadharma and ethical governance in Indian tradition*. MYJRF, an imprint of BOOKSKART WORLD.

Author Profile

Dr. Harshvardhan Singh is an education researcher, academic author, psychometrician, and policy-oriented scholar working in the areas of educational measurement, teacher education, inclusive education, Indian Knowledge Systems, governance studies, public ethics, research tool development, and evidence-based educational reform. His academic and professional work focuses on the relationship between knowledge, society, education, leadership, and public responsibility.

His writings engage with themes such as learning assessment, educational quality, inclusive education, neurodiversity, teacher capacity, life skills, civic responsibility, ethical leadership, ancient Indian wisdom, and the relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems for contemporary institutions. Through his work, he seeks to connect classical Indian thought with present-day questions of education, governance, social justice, public administration, and national development.

Dr. Singh's scholarship often explores how traditional concepts can be interpreted in contemporary contexts without reducing them to mere historical memory. His approach emphasises responsible interpretation, policy relevance, social usefulness, and academic clarity. He is particularly interested in the ways in which Indian philosophical and civilisational traditions can contribute to ethical governance, learner-centred education, public welfare, institutional reform, and the development of responsible citizenship.

In *Rajadharma and Ethical Governance in Indian Tradition*, Dr. Singh examines the idea of Rajadharma as a framework for moral governance, responsible leadership, justice, welfare, public duty, and contemporary administrative ethics. The book reflects his continuing interest in building bridges between Indian intellectual traditions and the practical challenges of modern democratic life.

Preface

Governance has always been one of the central questions of human civilisation. Every society has had to ask: What makes authority legitimate? What gives power moral direction? What responsibilities does a ruler, administrator, leader, or public representative owe to the people? How should justice be delivered? How should welfare be ensured? How should authority be restrained so that it does not become exploitation? These questions are not new. They are as old as organised human life itself.

Indian civilisation addressed these questions through a rich and layered tradition of thought. Among its most important concepts is *Rajadharma*—the dharma of rulership, governance, and public authority. *Rajadharma* does not treat governance as merely the management of territory, revenue, force, or administration. It views governance as a moral responsibility. In this framework, the ruler is not simply a possessor of power but a trustee of public welfare. Authority is not an entitlement; it is a duty. Power is not self-justifying; it becomes legitimate only when it is exercised for justice, protection, order, welfare, and the larger good.

This book, *Rajadharma and Ethical Governance in Indian Tradition*, has been written with the purpose of re-examining this classical Indian idea in a contemporary context. The book does not approach *Rajadharma* as a frozen historical doctrine. Instead, it treats it as a living ethical framework that can still speak meaningfully to modern questions of public administration, democratic leadership, constitutional morality, political accountability, welfare, justice, civil society participation, and responsible governance.

The ancient Indian imagination did not separate political life from moral life. The idea of dharma connected the individual, society, nature, state, and cosmic order. Governance was therefore expected to preserve harmony, prevent disorder, protect the vulnerable, restrain injustice, and enable people to pursue meaningful life goals. The ruler was expected to be disciplined, learned, restrained, compassionate, courageous, and accountable. In this sense, *Rajadharma* placed ethical restraints not only upon citizens but also upon those who held authority.

The book begins with the conceptual foundations of *Rajadharma* in Indian thought. It discusses how Indian tradition connected power with dharma, justice, welfare, and cosmic order. It then turns to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, where governance is explored not through abstract theory alone but through lived dilemmas, conflicts, responsibilities, and moral choices. These epics remain powerful because they show that leadership is tested most deeply when values collide with crisis.

The book also examines the *Arthashastra* and the administrative wisdom associated with Kautilya. This discussion is important because Indian governance thought was not merely idealistic or spiritual. It also possessed a strong practical dimension. The *Arthashastra* reflects a deep understanding of statecraft, administration, fiscal management, diplomacy, security, leadership training, and institutional design. The challenge, then and now, is to ensure that administrative skill remains guided by ethical purpose.

Another major focus of this book is *Nyaya*, or justice. Justice in Indian governance cannot be reduced only to formal procedure. It must also include fairness, protection, dignity, participation, and meaningful outcomes. In modern India, this has special relevance in the context of constitutional values, judicial institutions, legal aid, social justice, gender justice, marginalised communities, and participatory governance.

The book further discusses the ethics of power and responsibility. In every age, power has the potential to serve or dominate, protect or exploit, liberate or control. Ethical governance requires institutions,

accountability, transparency, self-restraint, and moral courage. It also requires public officials and political leaders to recognise that authority is always accompanied by responsibility.

The welfare orientation of Indian governance is another central theme. The book connects traditional ideas such as *loka hit*, *sarvodaya*, *yoga-kṣema*, and *lokasaṅgraha* with modern welfare policy, social development, public administration, and sustainable governance. A society cannot be considered well-governed if its weakest citizens remain excluded from dignity, security, justice, and opportunity.

The later chapters bring Rajadharma into direct conversation with modern public administration and contemporary political leadership. In democratic societies, the ruler is no longer a monarch, but the ethical questions remain. Ministers, administrators, elected representatives, judges, civil servants, community leaders, and citizens all participate in governance. Rajadharma, when interpreted responsibly, can therefore contribute to a culture of duty, accountability, compassion, justice, and service-oriented leadership.

The book is intended for students, teachers, researchers, civil service aspirants, public administration scholars, policymakers, political science students, educationists, leadership trainers, and readers interested in Indian Knowledge Systems. It may also be useful for those who wish to explore how Indian civilisational wisdom can inform ethical leadership and responsible public life in the twenty-first century.

The central argument of this book is simple: governance cannot remain ethical if power is separated from responsibility. Administration cannot remain humane if efficiency is separated from justice. Leadership cannot remain legitimate if authority is separated from service. Rajadharma reminds us that the true measure of governance lies not in the splendour of power but in the welfare, dignity, security, and moral flourishing of the people.

I hope this book encourages readers to revisit Indian governance traditions with seriousness, balance, and contemporary relevance. Ancient wisdom should neither be romanticised uncritically nor dismissed casually. It should be studied, interpreted, questioned, and applied with intellectual honesty. If this book contributes even modestly to such a dialogue, its purpose will be fulfilled.

Dr. Harshvardhan Singh

2026

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgement

I express my sincere gratitude to the rich intellectual heritage of Indian civilisation, whose concepts of dharma, Rajadharma, nyaya, lokahit, sarvodaya, yoga-kṣema, daṇḍa, and ethical responsibility continue to provide profound insights into the nature of governance and public life. The wisdom preserved in Indian texts, traditions, narratives, philosophical reflections, and civilisational memory has inspired the preparation of this book.

I am thankful to the teachers, scholars, researchers, students, and readers whose engagement with Indian Knowledge Systems has created a renewed interest in understanding the relevance of ancient Indian thought for contemporary society. Their questions, discussions, and intellectual curiosity have strengthened the need for works that connect classical ideas with modern governance, democracy, public administration, and ethical leadership.

I acknowledge the contribution of India's constitutional and democratic tradition, which provides the modern institutional framework within which questions of justice, welfare, accountability, public responsibility, and ethical governance must be understood. The dialogue between ancient wisdom and modern constitutional values forms an important foundation of this book.

I also acknowledge the support of the publishing and knowledge ecosystem associated with this work. The preparation of this book required academic planning, manuscript organisation, editorial refinement, formatting, and publication-readiness support. I am grateful to all those who contributed directly or indirectly to this process.

Special thanks are due to BOOKSKART WORLD and MYJRF for supporting the publication of this work and for contributing to the dissemination of academic, educational, and knowledge-based literature. Their role in providing a publishing platform for works related to Indian knowledge, education, research, and public thought is sincerely appreciated.

I also express my gratitude to readers who continue to encourage meaningful academic writing on Indian Knowledge Systems, education, governance, ethics, and public responsibility. Their interest reinforces the belief that books can contribute to public dialogue, intellectual clarity, and social awareness.

Finally, I offer my respectful acknowledgement to the larger tradition of seekers, thinkers, teachers, administrators, reformers, and public leaders who have upheld the idea that governance is not merely an exercise of authority but a sacred responsibility towards people, society, nature, and future generations.

Dr. Harshvardhan Singh

Methodological Note / Source Note

This book is a thematic, interpretative, and educational study of Rajadharma and ethical governance in the Indian tradition. It draws upon classical Indian concepts, epic narratives, philosophical ideas, governance traditions, administrative principles, and contemporary public administration concerns to develop a broad understanding of how Indian thought has approached the relationship between power, duty, justice, welfare, and leadership.

The book uses terms and ideas associated with the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Arthashastra, Dharmashastra traditions, Manusmriti, Bhagavad Gita, and broader Indian philosophical and political thought. These sources are treated as conceptual and civilisational resources for understanding ethical governance. The book does not claim to provide a critical philological edition, textual commentary, or exhaustive Sanskrit scholarship on these works. Instead, it presents their selected ideas in a manner suitable for students, teachers, researchers, policy readers, and general academic audiences.

The interpretation of Rajadharma in this book is organised around major themes such as moral authority, duty-bound leadership, justice, public welfare, restraint in the use of power, administrative responsibility, protection of the vulnerable, civil society participation, and contemporary leadership. These themes are discussed in relation to both ancient Indian frameworks and modern democratic institutions.

The book adopts a comparative and applied approach. Ancient Indian concepts are not treated as mechanically transferable to the present. Rather, they are interpreted in light of contemporary realities such as constitutional democracy, public administration, citizen rights, social justice, accountability, transparency, welfare policy, sustainable development, and political ethics. This approach recognises both continuity and change. It accepts that ancient wisdom can provide ethical direction, but modern institutions must operate within constitutional, democratic, legal, and human rights frameworks.

The Sanskrit and Indic terms used in the book have been presented primarily for conceptual clarity. In some places, simplified transliteration has been used for readability, while in others, diacritical marks have been retained where they help preserve meaning. The purpose is not linguistic technicality but conceptual understanding.

The references to historical rulers, epic characters, administrative models, public institutions, social movements, and contemporary governance examples are used for educational illustration. The book does not attempt to reduce complex historical realities to simplistic moral categories. Instead, it uses examples to demonstrate how ethical dilemmas, institutional choices, leadership qualities, and public responsibilities shape governance outcomes.

Readers are encouraged to approach this book as a bridge between Indian Knowledge Systems and contemporary governance studies. Its purpose is to stimulate reflection on how public authority can be made more ethical, just, accountable, welfare-oriented, and humane.

Transliteration and Terminology Note

This book uses several Sanskrit and Indic terms that are central to Indian political, ethical, and philosophical thought. These include terms such as *Rajadharma*, *dharma*, *rta*, *daṇḍa*, *nyaya*, *artha*, *Rāmarājya*, *sarvodaya*, *lokasaṅgraha*, *yoga-kṣema*, *niṣkāmbhāva*, *Dharmagopta*, *kṣatra tejā*, and *Brahma tejā*.

A simplified transliteration style has been followed for readability. Diacritical marks have been used selectively where they help clarify pronunciation or meaning. In some cases, widely familiar English

spellings such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Arthashastra, Manusmriti, and Kautilya have been used instead of fully diacritical academic forms. This choice has been made to make the text accessible to a wide readership, including students and general readers.

The meanings of Sanskrit terms are context-sensitive. A single term may carry philosophical, ethical, social, legal, political, and spiritual meanings depending on its usage. Therefore, the explanations provided in this book should be read as working interpretations rather than final or exhaustive definitions.

The word *dharma*, for example, has no exact one-word English equivalent. It may refer to duty, righteousness, moral order, law, ethical conduct, social responsibility, cosmic harmony, or the sustaining principle of life, depending on context. Similarly, *Rajadharma* is not merely “kingly duty” in a narrow sense; in this book it is understood as the ethical framework governing the use of political authority and public power.

Terms from Indian tradition have been retained wherever translation alone would reduce their depth. Brief explanations have been provided in the text and glossary to support readers unfamiliar with these concepts.

Abbreviations

ADR — Alternative Dispute Resolution
AI — Artificial Intelligence
CAG — Comptroller and Auditor General of India
CSR — Corporate Social Responsibility
DPSP — Directive Principles of State Policy
GDP — Gross Domestic Product
GDPR — General Data Protection Regulation
IKS — Indian Knowledge Systems
MGNREGA — Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NITI — National Institution for Transforming India
NGO — Non-Governmental Organisation
PIL — Public Interest Litigation
RTI — Right to Information
SDG — Sustainable Development Goal
UN — United Nations

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Executive Summary

Rajadharma and Ethical Governance in Indian Tradition explores one of the most significant ideas in Indian political and ethical thought: the idea that governance must be guided by dharma. In the Indian tradition, political authority was never meant to be merely a matter of power, control, taxation, territory, or administrative efficiency. It was expected to be morally restrained, socially responsible, welfare-oriented, and accountable to a higher ethical order. The concept of Rajadharma expresses this civilisational understanding.

Rajadharma may be understood as the dharma of governance, rulership, and public authority. It defines the duties, restraints, responsibilities, and ethical expectations associated with the exercise of power. Unlike models of governance that focus only on sovereignty or administrative control, Rajadharma views authority as a sacred trust. A ruler, minister, administrator, or public representative is not merely a holder of office but a custodian of justice, welfare, protection, order, and moral responsibility.

The book begins by examining the conceptual foundations of Rajadharma in Indian thought. It explains how the idea is connected with *dharma*, *rta*, *danḍa*, *nyaya*, *yoga-kṣema*, *loka-hit*, and *sarvodaya*. These concepts show that governance was expected to preserve social order, protect the weak, restrain injustice, promote welfare, and maintain harmony between individual life, social responsibility, nature, and the larger moral order. Political authority was legitimate only when it served the common good.

A major argument of the book is that Indian political thought placed duties before privileges. The ruler was not above dharma. Rather, the ruler was bound more deeply by dharma because the consequences of governance affected the lives of many. Rajadharma therefore demanded self-discipline, truthfulness, impartial justice, compassion, courage, administrative wisdom, and commitment to public welfare. It transformed power from entitlement into responsibility.

The book then turns to the Ramayana and Mahabharata as major sources of governance wisdom. These epics do not present governance merely as theory. They dramatise it through dilemmas, conflicts, failures, sacrifices, and choices. The Ramayana presents the ideal of Rāmarājya, where leadership is associated with truth, duty, public welfare, self-restraint, and moral accountability. The Mahabharata, especially through its conflicts and failures, shows what happens when ambition, greed, humiliation, weak institutions, and moral blindness distort governance. Together, the epics demonstrate that political failure is rarely only administrative; it is often ethical.

The Arthashastra is discussed as a major source of administrative and strategic wisdom. Kautilya's work shows that ancient Indian governance thought was not only spiritual or moral but also practical, systematic, and institutionally aware. The Arthashastra deals with state structure, ministers, revenue, security, diplomacy, law enforcement, training of rulers, and administrative competence. However, administrative skill becomes dangerous if separated from ethical direction. Therefore, the book interprets Arthashastra as a resource for understanding disciplined governance, institutional design, strategic thinking, and public responsibility.

Justice, or *nyaya*, forms another central theme of the book. Indian governance cannot be understood only through the idea of rule enforcement. Justice must also include fairness, dignity, access, protection, and meaningful outcomes. The book distinguishes procedural justice from substantive justice and connects ancient ideas of *nyaya* with modern constitutional commitments to social, economic, and political justice. It discusses legal aid, gender justice, reservation, judicial accountability, grassroots mobilisation, and participatory justice as important aspects of contemporary governance.

The ethics of power and responsibility is explored in relation to political authority, administrative institutions, corporate conduct, digital governance, civil society, and public accountability. Power may be used for welfare or domination. Therefore, ethical governance requires both personal virtue and institutional safeguards. Transparency, accountability, independent oversight, citizen participation, and moral leadership must work together. The book argues that personal morality alone is insufficient without institutions, while institutions alone cannot function well without ethical commitment.

The welfare orientation of Indian governance is examined through both traditional and modern lenses. Concepts such as *loka hit*, *sarvodaya*, *yoga-kṣema*, and *lokasaṅgraha* express the idea that governance must serve the well-being of all. In modern India, this connects with constitutional welfare, public schemes, social protection, digital delivery, state capacity, inclusive development, and sustainable governance. A state cannot be considered successful merely because it grows economically; it must also protect dignity, reduce vulnerability, expand opportunity, and serve those who are most in need.

The book also connects Rajadharma with modern public administration. In a democracy, governance is no longer centred on a king, but the ethical questions remain. Civil servants, ministers, elected representatives, judges, local bodies, civil society organisations, and citizens all participate in governance. Rajadharma can therefore be reinterpreted as a framework for public duty, administrative ethics, constitutional morality, citizen-centred service delivery, sustainable development, and institutional accountability.

The final chapter discusses lessons for contemporary political leadership. Modern leaders face complex challenges: electoral pressure, media scrutiny, digital misinformation, social diversity, youth aspirations, climate change, economic inequality, institutional decline, and crisis governance. Rajadharma offers a reminder that leadership must be rooted in service rather than self-interest. It must balance short-term demands with long-term responsibility. It must protect institutions, respect citizens, encourage participation, and remain accountable to future generations.

This book does not argue for a mechanical revival of ancient political systems. It recognises that modern India is a constitutional democracy based on liberty, equality, justice, dignity, and rights. However, it also argues that Indian Knowledge Systems contain ethical resources that can enrich modern public life. Rajadharma, when interpreted responsibly, can support democratic values by deepening the sense of duty, restraint, welfare, public service, and moral accountability.

The central message of the book is that governance becomes meaningful only when power is guided by ethics. Authority without responsibility becomes domination. Administration without justice becomes mechanical. Welfare without dignity becomes dependency. Leadership without self-restraint becomes dangerous. Rajadharma offers a framework for reconnecting governance with duty, justice, welfare, and the larger good.

For students, teachers, researchers, civil service aspirants, public administrators, policymakers, and general readers, this book provides an Indian civilisational perspective on ethical governance. It encourages readers to think beyond narrow political competition and administrative procedure. It invites reflection on the deeper purpose of governance: to protect, to serve, to uplift, to harmonise, and to create conditions in which individuals and society can flourish.

Key Concepts Used in the Book

Rajadharma

Rajadharma refers to the dharma of rulership, governance, and public authority. It defines the ethical duties, responsibilities, restraints, and obligations of those who exercise power. In this book, Rajadharma is interpreted as a framework for ethical governance, responsible leadership, justice, welfare, and accountability.

Dharma

Dharma is a foundational concept in Indian thought. It may mean duty, righteousness, moral order, law, ethical conduct, social responsibility, or the sustaining principle of life. In the context of governance, dharma provides the moral basis for legitimate authority.

Ṛta

Ṛta refers to cosmic order, harmony, and the principle of universal balance. It suggests that governance must not create disorder, injustice, or imbalance but should align human society with a larger moral and natural order.

Danḍa

Danḍa literally refers to the rod, authority, punishment, or coercive power of the state. In ethical governance, danḍa is not arbitrary force. It is legitimate authority used to protect society, prevent injustice, and maintain order when guided by dharma.

Nyaya

Nyaya means justice. It includes fairness, reason, lawful conduct, and the delivery of meaningful justice. In this book, nyaya is discussed as both procedural and substantive justice.

Niti

Niti refers to policy, conduct, method, or rule-based procedure. While niti is important for governance, it must be guided by nyaya and dharma so that procedure does not become detached from justice.

Artha

Artha refers to material well-being, resources, wealth, political economy, and practical statecraft. In governance, artha must be pursued ethically and in balance with dharma.

Arthashastra

The Arthashastra is an important classical Indian text associated with Kautilya. It discusses statecraft, administration, economy, diplomacy, security, law enforcement, and governance strategy.

Kautilya

Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, is traditionally associated with the Arthashastra. He represents a practical and strategic dimension of Indian political thought.

Rāmarājya

Rāmarājya refers to the idealised rule of Rama. It symbolises ethical leadership, justice, public welfare, moral governance, and social harmony. In modern political thought, it is often interpreted as a model of welfare-oriented and morally responsible governance.

Sarvodaya

Sarvodaya means the upliftment or welfare of all. It expresses the idea that governance should not benefit only a few groups but should work for the well-being of all sections of society.

Lokahit

Lokahit means public welfare or the good of the people. It is a key principle in welfare-oriented governance and public policy.

Lokasaṅgraha

Lokasaṅgraha means holding society together or sustaining social cohesion. It emphasises responsibility towards collective order, social harmony, and the common good.

Yoga-kṣema

Yoga-kṣema refers to preservation, security, welfare, and advancement. In governance, it suggests that the state should protect existing resources and promote the well-being of people.

Niṣkāmbhāva

Niṣkāmbhāva means selfless action without attachment to personal gain. In leadership, it implies that public authority should be exercised for collective welfare rather than personal ambition.

Dharmagopta

Dharmagopta means protector of dharma. In the context of Rajadharma, the ruler or leader is expected to protect moral order, justice, and public welfare.

Kṣatra Tejā

Kṣatra tejā refers to the power, courage, and authority associated with rulership and protection. It must be guided by dharma and restrained by wisdom.

Brahma Tejā

Brahma tejā refers to spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and moral illumination. In Indian governance thought, temporal power must be guided by higher wisdom.

Public Accountability

Public accountability means that those who exercise authority must remain answerable to citizens, institutions, law, ethics, and the larger public good.

Constitutional Morality

Constitutional morality refers to respect for constitutional values, institutions, procedures, rights, duties, equality, liberty, justice, and dignity. It is essential for modern democratic governance.

Ethical Governance

Ethical governance means the exercise of authority according to moral principles such as justice, transparency, fairness, welfare, responsibility, and respect for human dignity.

Public Administration

Public administration refers to the implementation of laws, policies, programmes, and welfare measures through governmental institutions and administrative systems.

Civil Society

Civil society includes non-governmental organisations, community groups, citizen movements, professional associations, advocacy networks, and voluntary bodies that contribute to public welfare and accountability.

Participatory Governance

Participatory governance refers to the involvement of citizens and communities in decision-making, monitoring, social audits, local planning, and public accountability.

Welfare State

A welfare state is a governance system that accepts responsibility for social security, public welfare, health, education, livelihood, dignity, and support for vulnerable populations.

Sustainable Governance

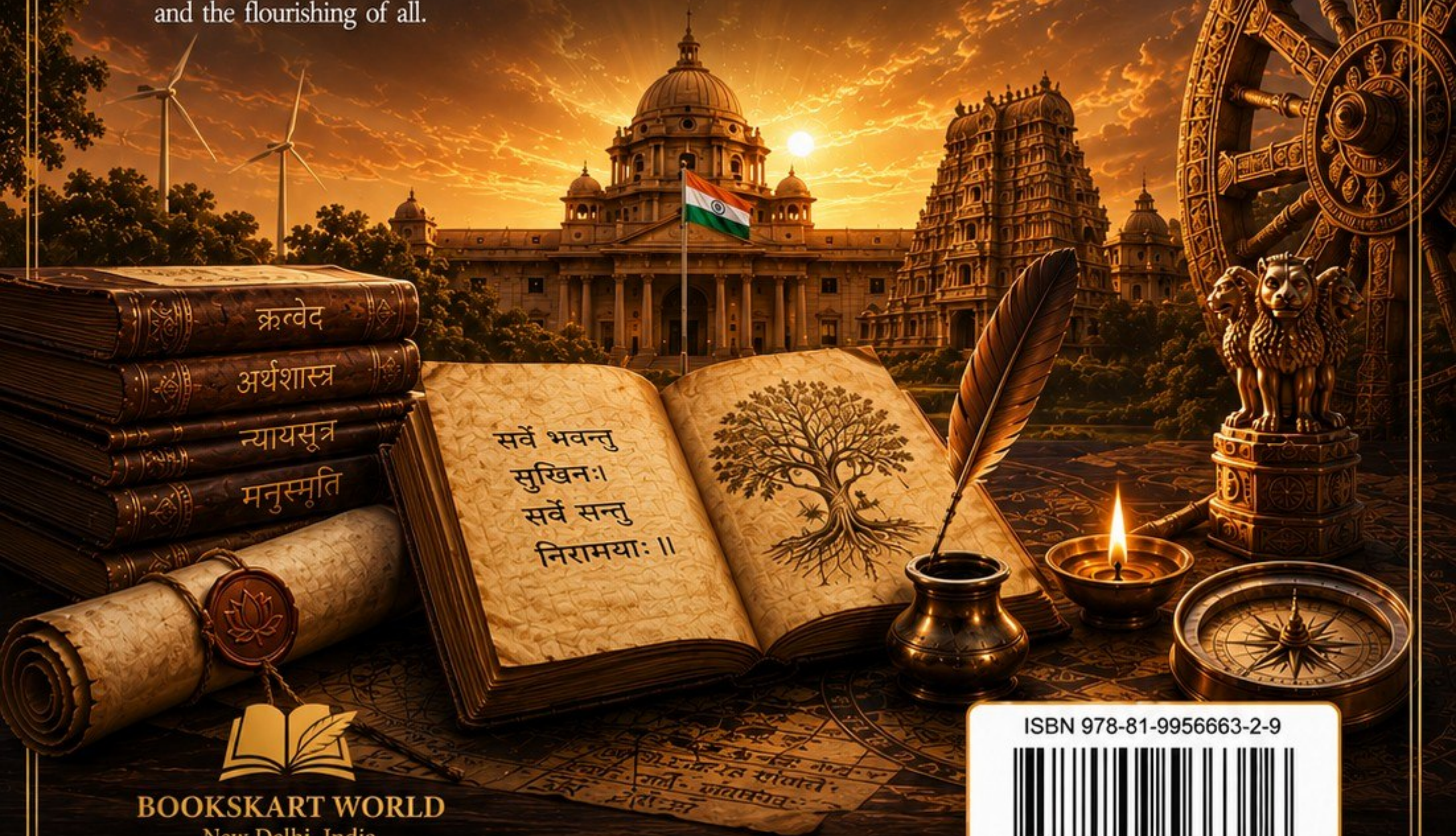
Sustainable governance refers to decision-making that balances present needs with future responsibilities, environmental protection, social justice, and long-term public welfare.

What makes governance ethical? What transforms political power into public responsibility? What can ancient Indian thought contribute to modern debates on justice, welfare, administration, leadership, and accountability?

Rajadharma and Ethical Governance in Indian Tradition explores these questions through the Indian civilisational idea of *Rajadharma*—the dharma of rulership, governance, and public authority. The book examines how Indian thought connected power with duty, justice, restraint, welfare, and moral accountability. Drawing upon concepts from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Arthashastra*, *Dharmashastra* traditions, and wider Indian philosophical reflection, it presents *Rajadharma* as a framework for responsible leadership and ethical public life.

The book connects classical ideas such as dharma, daṇḍa, nyaya, Rāmarājya, sarvodaya, lokahit, yoga-kṣema, and lokasaṅgraha with contemporary concerns including constitutional morality, public administration, corruption, civil society, welfare policy, sustainable governance, and democratic leadership.

Written for students, teachers, researchers, civil service aspirants, policy readers, public administration scholars, and readers interested in Indian Knowledge Systems, this book argues that governance cannot remain meaningful if power is separated from responsibility. Rajadharma reminds us that the true purpose of authority is not domination, but protection, justice, welfare, harmony, and the flourishing of all.



BOOKSKART WORLD

New Delhi, India

— 2026 —

ISBN 978-81-9956663-2-9



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