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Poetic Pathways: Rediscovering Dharma through the Vision of Sri Paramahansa Yogananda

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Abstract: The concept of dharma has long served as the moral and ethical compass of Indian civilization, shaping human conduct and ensuring social harmony. While ethics and morals function as universal principles to distinguish right from wrong, dharma extends beyond individual behavior to encompass duties, responsibilities, and the pursuit of collective well-being. These values are defined through human reason, cultural tradition, and spiritual insight, providing a framework through which societies determine justice and righteousness. Yet in today's modern and materialistic world, adherence to such ethical and moral codes has weakened, giving rise to confusion, self-interest, and moral decline. The timeless wisdom of saints and the enduring teachings of scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* offer pathways to rediscover dharma and realign human action with higher principles. This research paper undertakes a study of the poetry of Sri Paramahansa Yogananda, exploring how his spiritual vision and poetic expression embody ethical values, moral guidance, and universal principles. By examining his poetic works through the lens of ethics and morality, the paper seeks to demonstrate how Yogananda revitalizes the essence of dharma for modern times, offering a bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary moral challenges. His poetry not only reflects profound spiritual truths but also serves as a guiding force for individuals and societies striving to restore integrity, responsibility, and inner harmony in a rapidly changing world.

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Dharma has long served as the moral and ethical compass of civilization, shaping individual conduct and sustaining the harmony of collective life in the Indian philosophical tradition. It is ingrained in the Sanskrit root 'dhr' which means 'to uphold,' dharma signifies that which maintains moral and cosmic order. More than a mere distinction between right and wrong, it represents a holistic vision of existence that unites righteousness, duty, justice, and harmony. It calls upon individuals to act in alignment with a larger cosmic and social balance, integrating personal responsibility, social obligations, and the pursuit of collective well-being. In this view, morality is not a private affair but a shared responsibility essential for sustaining family, society, and the world. When lived authentically, dharma becomes the axis around which ethical action and spiritual evolution revolve. In the modern era which is marked by technological advancement, globalization, and material pursuits, this dharmic orientation faces unprecedented challenges. Individualism, moral relativism, and utilitarian self-interest increasingly overshadow traditional values, leading to ethical disorientation, social fragmentation, and spiritual restlessness. As moral anchors weaken, collective responsibility erodes, making the rediscovery and reinterpretation of dharma an urgent necessity.

The foundations of dharma are deeply embedded in India's sacred texts, particularly the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*. The *Gita* frames dharma as a call to action performed with detachment, harmonizing duty with spiritual

freedom. The *Ramayana* exemplifies it through Rama's unwavering commitment to righteousness, even at great personal cost, while the *Mahabharata* explores its complexity through moral conflict and discernment, revealing that dharma often demands context-sensitive judgment rather than rigid adherence to rules. Together, these texts reveal dharma as a dynamic principle that adapts to changing circumstances while remaining grounded in eternal truth.

Modern Indian thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan deepen this understanding by situating dharma within the evolution of human consciousness. Aurobindo views it as the inner law of one's being, a progressive force guiding the soul toward divine fulfillment. In *Essays on the Gita*, he presents dharma as a living and growing truth that reflects the soul's unique purpose (svadharma), harmonizing individual action with universal order. Similarly, Radhakrishnan, in *The Hindu View of Life*, frames dharma as 'sanatanadharmā', the eternal law that integrates individual freedom with social responsibility and remains open to reinterpretation in changing historical contexts. Taken together, their perspectives present dharma as both an inward spiritual compass and a universal moral order, timeless yet adaptive.

It is within this intellectual and spiritual continuum that the poetry of Sri Paramahansa Yogananda gains special significance. Renowned for bridging Eastern wisdom with Western rationality, Yogananda is widely celebrated for *Autobiography of a Yogi*, yet his poetry represents an equally potent though less explored

dimension of his spiritual mission. His poems, rich with devotional intensity and universal vision, serve as spiritual guides that inspire self-realization, ethical awareness, and righteous action. Through vivid imagery and meditative rhythm, they invite readers to transcend ego-driven impulses, reawaken dharmic consciousness, and live in harmony with higher principles. In an age marked by moral confusion and spiritual alienation, Yogananda's poetry offers a practical and transformative response, reconnecting individuals to the timeless ideals of truth, justice, and compassion. His vision of dharma is rooted in his broader mission of guiding humanity toward self-realization and higher consciousness. For him, dharma is not a rigid code of conduct but a living, universal principle harmonizing the inner life of the individual with the greater cosmic order. He emphasized that true dharma arises from the soul's alignment with divine will and that fulfilling one's dharma is essential for both personal liberation and social harmony. This perspective aligns with the yogic ideal of self-realization, direct communion with the divine, an experience that transforms the moral and spiritual orientation of the individual. When one recognizes their true nature as the soul, moral action flows naturally as an expression of inner harmony rather than external compulsion. This approach reframes duty not as something imposed by society but as an opportunity for spiritual growth and service. Yogananda encouraged individuals to see their work, relationships, and challenges as elements of a divine plan through which the soul evolves. In this way, dharma becomes the natural path of action that leads to freedom, compassion, and clarity. This teaching is particularly relevant in the modern context, where materialism and utilitarian ethics often sever action from its spiritual dimension, leading to alienation and discontent. Yogananda's vision restores depth to moral life by presenting righteous action as not merely a social necessity but a means of inner transformation. A distinctive feature of Yogananda's thought is his synthesis of Eastern and Western perspectives. Through his lectures, writings, and poetry, he presented India's spiritual heritage in a way that resonated with a global audience. His interpretation of dharma as a universal principle transcends cultural, religious, and sectarian boundaries. Drawing from Vedantic and yogic traditions, he spoke in a language that was psychologically and philosophically accessible to the modern mind. His teachings demonstrate that dharma is not exclusively Hindu or Indian but a spiritual law relevant to all humanity, addressing shared ethical dilemmas in an age of rapid change.

Yogananda's works embody this vision with remarkable clarity. His verses are charged with devotional intensity that uses luminous imagery to evoke the divine presence and call to righteous action. They blend personal yearning with universal

aspiration, reminding readers that moral integrity and spiritual discipline are complementary expressions of the same inner truth. Through this poetic voice, Yogananda transforms dharma from a distant abstraction into a lived, intimate experience, inspiring readers to live with compassion, courage, and a sense of higher purpose. In this way, his poetry becomes both a mirror and a guide, reflecting the soul's potential and directing it toward its divine destiny.

"Open the windows of calmness and you will find a sudden burst of the bright sun of joy within your very Self." (Yogananda 67) This reflects the dharmic insight that inner equanimity is the foundation of moral clarity and righteous action. Calmness here represents the state of mental stillness essential for perceiving truth without distortion. By 'opening the windows', the seeker quiets restlessness and ego, allowing the 'sun of joy', the light of higher consciousness to illumine the inner self. This state closely parallels the *Bhagavad Gita's* ideal of 'sthita-prajna', the one of steady wisdom whose mind remains serene amidst pleasure and pain and who acts in harmony with cosmic order. From an ethical standpoint, such calmness transforms morality into a natural expression of the awakened self, manifesting as compassion, integrity, and non-violence. Thus, the line suggests that ethical action is not externally enforced but flows spontaneously from inner illumination and spiritual balance.

"I will plunge the gaze of my faith through the window of the spiritual eye and baptise my body in the healing of Christ consciousness." (Yogananda 72) This expresses an inward turning toward spiritual clarity that leads to ethical transformation. The 'spiritual eye', a yogic symbol for higher intuition, represents the faculty through which one transcends sensory distractions and perceives divine guidance. This act mirrors the *Bhagavad Gita's* teaching of 'karma-yoga', which calls upon individuals to align their actions with divine will and perform their duties selflessly. The 'baptism' of the body in Christ consciousness suggests a purification of thought and action so that one's life becomes an instrument of compassion, truth, and service. In this way, the line conveys that dharma is realized not only in inner contemplation but also in righteous action guided by spiritual insight, harmonizing personal transformation with the welfare of the world.

"Eternal youth of body and mind, abide in me forever, forever, forever" (Yogananda 75) is a prayer for the continuous renewal of vitality and clarity needed to fulfill one's dharma. In this context, 'eternal youth' represents the freshness of mind and resilience of spirit that allow an individual to approach duties (svadharma) with unwavering energy and moral balance. Rather than a literal desire to escape aging, it reflects a yearning for the inner vigor that keeps one free from weariness, despair, and ethical stagnation. This aspiration resonates with the *Bhagavad*

Gita's teaching of 'nitya-yoga', the discipline of constant spiritual practice through which one maintains inner steadiness and readiness to act in harmony with cosmic order. Ethically, this sustained renewal enables compassion, integrity, and courage to flow consistently into one's actions, making dharma a living, dynamic force rather than a mere abstract ideal.

"I am happy in the happiness of dear ones who are on the earth or in the great beyond." (Yogananda 76) This assertion conveys the dharmic ideal of transcending ego-centered attachment to cultivate expansive, selfless love. By rejoicing in the happiness of loved ones whether living or departed, the speaker demonstrates 'maitrī' (loving-kindness) and 'muditā' (sympathetic joy), virtues celebrated in Indian philosophy as integral to ethical living. This attitude aligns with dharma by dissolving possessiveness and grief, allowing relationships to be guided by harmony rather than clinging or sorrow. It also resonates with the *Bhagavad Gita's* vision of the wise person who views life and death with equanimity and acts from a sense of unity with all beings. Ethically, such joy purifies intention, replacing jealousy, grief, or attachment with compassion and acceptance, thereby promoting both inner peace and right conduct toward others.

"To give hatred for hatred is easy, but to give love for hatred is more difficult and far greater." (Yogananda 79) He expresses one of the highest principles of dharma, the call to break the cycle of anger and retaliation. Responding to hatred with hatred fuels 'adharma' and deepens suffering, whereas answering with love restores balance and aligns one's actions with 'ṛta', the cosmic order. Ethically, choosing love over hatred requires inner discipline, forgiveness, and recognition of the divine in all beings, including adversaries. Such a response transforms conflict into an occasion for spiritual growth, turning morality into a means of sustaining dharma and fostering universal harmony.

"...teach me to include the prosperity of others in the pursuit of my own prosperity." (Yogananda 82) This beautifully embodies the dharmic principle that individual well-being is inseparable from collective welfare. In the Indian tradition, dharma calls for actions that uphold harmony and sustain the greater good, not merely personal gain. This prayer recognizes that true prosperity is not selfish accumulation but shared flourishing, echoing the Vedic ideal of 'sarvebhavantusukhinah' (may all be happy). Ethically, it transforms the pursuit of success into an altruistic endeavor, guided by fairness, compassion, and social responsibility. By seeking to align personal goals with the upliftment of others, the line turns prosperity into a moral and spiritual practice, ensuring that one's actions contribute to the balance of society and the cosmic order rather than disturbing it.

The thought "I am a spark from the Infinite. I am not flesh and bones. I am Light." (Yogananda 84) affirms the Vedantic truth that one's essence is beyond the body and mind, rooted in the eternal Self. By declaring oneself a 'spark from the Infinite', the speaker recognizes their identity as part of the divine whole, echoing the *Gita's* teaching that the Self (ātman) is 'ajōnityaḥśāśvato yampurāṇo' (unborn, eternal, changeless) and ancient (*Bhagavad Gita* 2.20). This realization shifts life's orientation from mere material pursuit to living in alignment with one's higher dharma. The statement "I am not flesh and bones" reflects the *Gita's* distinction between the perishable body (kṣetra) and the imperishable knower of the field (kṣetrajña), (*Bhagavad Gita* 13.2), while "I am Light" resonates with Krishna's description of the Self as the light of all lights that shines beyond darkness "jyotiṣāmapī taj jyotiṣ", (*Bhagavad Gita* 13.17). Ethically, such awareness frees one from fear, greed, and egoism, leading to compassion, equanimity, and selfless action (karma-yoga). In this way, the line becomes a declaration of spiritual identity that naturally guides the individual toward righteous living and the sustenance of dharma in the world.

Thus, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda's poetry emerges as a luminous bridge between timeless dharmic wisdom and the moral challenges of the modern age. Through his verses, Yogananda transforms abstract ethical principles into lived spiritual experience, guiding readers to rediscover the harmony between inner realization and outward action. His poetic vision affirms that dharma is not a rigid code but a living principle that integrates personal responsibility, compassion, and alignment with the cosmic order. By drawing upon the universal truths of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other sacred texts, his work reframes morality as a natural outflow of the awakened Self, not merely a social obligation. In a time marked by moral disorientation, materialism, and fragmentation, Yogananda's poetry provides a pathway toward renewed integrity, courage, and spiritual clarity. It reminds humanity that righteous action is both a personal duty and a collective necessity, ensuring the flourishing of society and the evolution of the soul. Ultimately, Yogananda's poetic legacy stands as an invitation to live dharma consciously to act with love where there is hatred, to seek the welfare of others in one's own prosperity, and to recognize the divine spark within oneself and all beings. In doing so, his work offers not only a philosophical framework but also a transformative call to action, making dharma an enduring, practical, and deeply relevant force for navigating the complexities of the contemporary world.

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