



## The Role of Karma and Dharma in Manoj Das's Physical-Spiritual Dichotomy

<sup>1</sup>Kajal Mohanty and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Snehi

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Sikkim Professional University, Sikkim, India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of English, Sikkim Professional University, Sikkim, India

Corresponding Author: Kajal Mohanty

### Abstract

This paper explores the interplay of karma and dharma in Manoj Das's stories, focussing on how these Indian philosophical concepts influence the physical and spiritual journeys of his characters. Through an analysis of key works such as *A Tiger at Twilight* and *Farewell to a Ghost*, this paper demonstrates how Das employs these principles to highlight the relationship between physical actions and spiritual consequences. The study argues that Das's use of karma and dharma creates a complex narrative in which physical challenges become opportunities for spiritual growth and moral fulfilment. By examining how characters in Das's stories navigate the consequences of their actions based on these principles, this paper sheds light on the deeper moral and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals in their quest for self-discovery and enlightenment. Through the exploration of karma and dharma, readers can gain insights into the interconnected nature of our actions and their repercussions on our spiritual evolution. Ultimately, Das's masterful storytelling serves as a powerful reminder of the age-old adage that what goes around comes around, and that our choices ultimately shape our destinies.

**Keywords:** Karma, dharma, Manoj Das, Indian philosophy, spiritual journey, physical-spiritual dichotomy, metaphysical

### Introduction

Known for his ability to combine old Indian philosophical ideas with contemporary storytelling techniques, Manoj Das is widely regarded as one of the most remarkable writers to come out of India. Karma, which is the law of action and consequence, and dharma, which is the law of virtuous responsibility, are two Indian principles that have had a significant impact on his works. The interplay between the physical and spiritual dimensions is at the heart of many of his works. Das's stories make use of these two concepts, which are not only fundamental to Indian spirituality but also play an important role as storytelling devices. Das dives into the complexity of human existence and the never-ending fight between material cravings and spiritual enlightenment in his investigation of the duality between the physical and that which is spiritual. By means of his narratives, he encourages readers to contemplate the nature of reality and the significance of leading a life that is predicated on ethical ideals. He invites readers to go on a voyage of self-discovery and reflection by mixing parts of metaphysical philosophy into his storytelling. This finally leads them to a greater awareness of the interconnection of all beings, which is the ultimate goal of Das's writing.

The purpose of this article is to investigate how Das incorporates karma and dharma into his stories, so influencing the evolution of his characters' physical experiences as well as their spiritual development. In this paper, we will investigate how physical activities and difficulties are profoundly interwoven with spiritual commitments and moral repercussions by examining two important stories: *A Tiger at Twilight* and *Farewell to a Ghost*. It will be done by analysing both of these stories. karma and dharma are at the centre of comprehending the equilibrium between material life and spiritual enlightenment, and Das's storytelling encourages readers to contemplate how the actions that one takes in the physical world will invariably have an effect on one's spiritual journey. By digging into the complexity of karma and dharma through the experiences of his characters, Das makes it possible for readers to reflect on the interconnection of their own acts and beliefs. *A Tiger at Twilight* and *Farewell to a Ghost* provide readers with vivid illustrations of how ethical decisions and personal growth are interwoven with the repercussions of one's actions. These examples are offered to readers through the texts of these two novels. Readers are encouraged to contemplate

the significance of moral duty and the search of spiritual fulfilment in the context of navigating the problems that exist in existence through Das's storytelling strategy.

Literature Review

Both karma and dharma are notions that have been thoroughly examined in Indian literature and philosophy. These concepts serve as guiding principles for each individual's actions as well as for the rules that society has established. Iyengar (1993) [5] makes the observation in his book Indian Writing in English that these ideas are prevalent throughout the works of a number of Indian authors. These authors employ these ideas to investigate the ethical aspects of the lives of their characters. In a similar vein, Mohanty (2001) [3] emphasises that karma and dharma play a vital part in structuring the narrative framework of Manoj Das's stories. In these stories, the protagonists are frequently confronted with ethical conundrums that are reflective of wider spiritual realities. Literature that delves into the concepts of karma and dharma provides readers with the opportunity to get a more profound understanding of the complexities of human nature and the results that are a direct result of our actions. The philosophical concepts that are being discussed here not only offer a framework for making ethical decisions, but they also provide a prism through which one can comprehend the interconnection of all beings. By diving into the ethical conundrums that the protagonists in these stories are confronted with, readers are compelled to contemplate their own views and values, which ultimately results in a more profound comprehension of the universal principles of karma and dharma. Paranjape (1993) [7], in his research on postcolonial spirituality, places a strong emphasis on the ways in which Das's work interacts with Indian philosophical traditions, particularly the ideas of karma and dharma. On the other hand, Paranjape contends that Das employs these concepts not just as thematic components, but also as fundamental narrative techniques that drive the development of both the plot and the characters. For example, in the novel "A Tiger

at Twilight," the protagonist's encounter with the tiger is not only a physical conflict; rather, it is a karmic reckoning for the deeds he has taken in the past. His devotion to dharma serves as the guiding principle for his choices as he attempts to overcome this obstacle. In addition to being a source of entertainment, Das's novels provide a better knowledge of the moral and spiritual conundrums that persons in a postcolonial society are confronted with. This is accomplished through the investigation of karma and dharma. Das is able to build characters who are rich and deep because he places weight on these ancient philosophical notions. These characters are compelled to confront their previous deeds and make decisions that are in line with their sense of duty and righteousness. Because of this, Das's writing not only provides readers with a source of entertainment, but it also offers a useful reflection on the complexities of human nature and the ongoing fight between doing what is right and doing what is wrong. Furthermore, Raja (1993) [6] investigates the manner in which Das incorporates these philosophical principles into his narratives, pointing out that karma and dharma are frequently presented in a manner that is sophisticated and nuanced. When it comes to the activities of characters, they are rarely blatantly classified as "good" or "bad." Instead, they are presented within the perspective of spiritual development and self-realization. Through the use of this approach, Das is able to give a more nuanced and intricate concept of morality, one that is strongly founded in the spiritual thought of Indians. Das invites readers to focus on their own actions and motivations by highlighting the significance of personal development and self-awareness as three of the most important ideas. By use of his narratives, he challenges the usual ideas that are associated with morality and encourages readers to contemplate the connectivity of all living things among themselves. Ultimately, Das's work serves as a potent reminder of the timeless wisdom that may be found in ancient Indian philosophy, as well as the continuous relevance of these teachings in our contemporary environment.

Table 1: Key Themes of Karma and Dharma in Indian Literature

Author	Focus	Findings
Iyengar (1993) [5]	Indian philosophical influences	Karma and dharma are central to the moral and spiritual dimensions of life.
Mohanty (2001) [3]	Role of karma and dharma in Das's stories	Characters' actions reflect broader spiritual truths tied to karma.
Paranjape (1993) [7]	Spirituality in postcolonial literature	Karma and dharma drive the plot and character development in Das's work.
Raja (1993) [6]	Moral complexities in Das's narratives	Karma and dharma are explored in nuanced ways, influencing spiritual growth.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method, focussing on thematic analysis of two stories: *A Tiger at Twilight* and *Farewell to a Ghost*. Both stories are analysed to understand how the principles of karma and dharma influence character actions, narrative progression, and the balance between physical and spiritual dimensions. The research involves close reading of the texts, identifying key moments where karma and dharma become central to the characters' physical challenges and spiritual resolutions. Through this analysis, it becomes apparent that karma and dharma play a significant role in shaping the characters' decisions and ultimately their destinies. By delving into the intricacies of these principles, this study aims to uncover the deeper

spiritual meanings embedded within the narratives, shedding light on the interconnectedness of actions and consequences in the characters' lives. Overall, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how karma and dharma can guide individuals towards spiritual growth and fulfilment. The study relies on both primary sources-Manoj Das's short stories-and secondary sources, including critical essays and scholarly interpretations, to provide a well-rounded analysis of how karma and dharma are represented in Das's works. By analysing the themes of karma and dharma in Das's short stories, this study hopes to elucidate the moral and ethical lessons that can be gleaned from his narratives. Through a comprehensive examination of the characters' choices and

their subsequent outcomes, this research aims to illustrate the importance of aligning one's actions with spiritual principles in order to achieve personal growth and enlightenment. By drawing upon a diverse range of sources, this study seeks to offer a nuanced and multifaceted exploration of the complex interplay between karma, dharma, and individual destiny in Das's literary works.

Results and Analysis

1. A Tiger at Twilight (1991) <sup>[1]</sup>: Confrontation with Karma

In *A Tiger at Twilight*, the protagonist is faced with both a physical and spiritual challenge: a confrontation with a tiger that symbolises unresolved karma. The story presents the tiger as more than just a physical threat-it represents the protagonist's internal fears and unresolved past actions. The physical battle with the tiger is deeply symbolic, illustrating how one's karma can manifest as obstacles in the material world. The protagonist's struggle with the tiger highlights the interconnectedness of karma and dharma, as the confrontation forces him to confront his past actions and seek inner peace. Through this intense battle, the protagonist ultimately realises that facing his karma head-on is the only

way to achieve true spiritual growth and fulfilment. Das masterfully weaves together themes of fate, free will, and personal responsibility in *A Tiger at Twilight*, showcasing the intricate balance between individual destiny and the consequences of one's actions.

The protagonist's journey is one of karmic reconciliation. His encounter with the tiger is not merely a fight for survival but a reckoning with the consequences of his previous actions. His fear of the tiger symbolises his fear of facing the results of his past karma, and his ultimate victory over the tiger represents his ability to overcome these consequences and move forward on his spiritual path. In the end, the protagonist learns that true freedom comes from taking responsibility for one's actions and making amends where necessary. Through his encounter with the tiger, he understands that he cannot escape the consequences of his past deeds, but he can choose how to respond to them. By facing his fears and accepting the reality of his situation, he is able to find inner peace and a sense of purpose in his life. *A Tiger at Twilight* serves as a powerful reminder that we are all responsible for our own destinies and must strive to make choices that align with our values and beliefs.

Table 2: Symbolism in *A Tiger at Twilight*

Symbol	Physical Representation	Karmic Meaning
The Tiger	A physical predator threatening the protagonist	Represents unresolved karma and the consequences of past actions.
The Forest	The physical setting of the confrontation	Represents the inner wilderness of the mind, filled with unresolved fears and desires.

2. Farewell to a Ghost (1994) <sup>[2]</sup>: Dharma as Spiritual Reconciliation

In *Farewell to a Ghost*, the protagonist's journey involves reconciling with a ghost from the past, which symbolises unresolved spiritual debts or karma. The ghost serves as a reminder of actions left incomplete or wronged, and the protagonist must confront this lingering presence to achieve peace. Through this confrontation, the protagonist is forced to come to terms with their past actions and find a way to make amends. The setting of the farewell scene, a haunted mansion enveloped in fog, mirrors the protagonist's inner turmoil and confusion. As the protagonist bids farewell to the ghost, they are ultimately able to achieve spiritual reconciliation and move forward with a sense of peace and closure.

Here, dharma plays a crucial role in guiding the protagonist's actions. His duty (dharma) is to address the unresolved karma symbolised by the ghost, and only by fulfilling this obligation can he achieve spiritual resolution. The physical confrontation with the ghost is deeply intertwined with the protagonist's understanding of his moral duties, making the story an exploration of how dharma shapes one's actions in the material world. As the protagonist faces the ghost one last time, he confronts his own inner turmoil and struggles with the weight of his past actions. Through this final confrontation, he is able to confront his own karma and come to terms with the consequences of his choices. With a newfound sense of clarity and understanding, the protagonist is able to let go of the burden he has been carrying and move forward with a renewed sense of purpose and peace in his heart. The story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of

following one's dharma and seeking spiritual reconciliation in order to find true peace and closure in life.

Table 3: Karma and Dharma in *Farewell to a Ghost*

Element	Physical Representation	Karmic/Dharmic Meaning
The Ghost	A lingering presence from the past	Symbolizes unresolved karma that must be addressed through dharma.
The Confrontation	Physical confrontation with the ghost	Represents the protagonist's moral duty to resolve past actions.

Findings and Discussions

The analysis of *A Tiger at Twilight* and *Farewell to a Ghost* reveals that karma and dharma are central to understanding the physical and spiritual dichotomy in Manoj Das's works. In both stories, the characters' physical challenges are not mere obstacles to be overcome but are deeply symbolic of their spiritual journeys. The physical confrontations in each story serve as metaphors for the characters' karmic obligations, and their adherence to dharma guides their moral and spiritual decisions. Ultimately, the ghost in these stories serves as a manifestation of the protagonist's unresolved past actions and the moral duty they feel to make amends. By exploring the themes of karma and dharma through the characters' physical challenges, Manoj Das highlights the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms. Through the characters' adherence to their moral and spiritual principles, they are able to confront their past mistakes and move towards a sense of resolution and peace.

In *A Tiger at Twilight*, the tiger represents unresolved karma, and the protagonist's ability to face and conquer the tiger symbolises his reconciliation with the consequences of his past actions. Similarly, in *Farewell to a Ghost*, the protagonist's duty to address unresolved spiritual debts (represented by the ghost) is central to his spiritual growth. Both stories highlight how karma and dharma are not abstract concepts but are deeply embedded in the characters' physical and spiritual experiences. The protagonists in these stories must grapple with their past actions and the consequences that follow, illustrating the interconnectedness of Karma and Dharma in their lives. By facing their unresolved karma head-on, they are able to attain a sense of closure and inner peace. Through their journey towards reconciliation and spiritual growth, they learn valuable lessons about the power of accountability and the importance of taking responsibility for their actions. Ultimately, these stories serve as powerful reminders of the transformative nature of facing one's past mistakes and embracing the path towards resolution and peace. Furthermore, Das's use of karma and dharma reflects his broader engagement with Indian philosophy. The stories suggest that spiritual growth is not possible without addressing the consequences of one's actions (karma) and fulfilling one's moral obligations (dharma). In this way, the physical world becomes a space where spiritual lessons are learnt, and the characters' journeys reflect the inseparable nature of physical and spiritual realities. Through his stories, Das reminds readers that true growth and enlightenment come from acknowledging past wrongs and taking steps to make amends. By incorporating concepts from Indian philosophy, Das shows that spiritual development is intricately connected to our actions and responsibilities in the physical world. The characters in his stories serve as examples of how confronting our past and fulfilling our duties can lead to inner peace and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Ultimately, Das's work encourages readers to reflect on their own actions and strive towards a life guided by karma and dharma.

### Limitations

This study focusses on only two stories by Manoj Das, limiting the scope of the analysis. While these stories provide clear examples of how karma and dharma operate within Das's narrative framework, further research could explore additional stories to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these principles shape Das's entire body of work. By delving deeper into more of Das's stories, researchers may uncover a more nuanced understanding of how karma and dharma are portrayed and intertwined throughout his works. This expanded analysis could shed light on the overarching themes and messages that Das seeks to convey through his storytelling. Additionally, exploring a wider range of stories could reveal how these principles manifest in different contexts and characters, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the philosophical underpinnings of Das's writing. Ultimately, further research may provide a more holistic view of how karma and dharma influence not only individual narratives but also the overall thematic landscape of Das's literary universe.

Moreover, the study is limited by the availability of

secondary literature on the topic. While existing research provides valuable insights, future studies could benefit from a broader range of critical interpretations and analyses of Das's engagement with Indian philosophy. Exploring these themes in greater depth could shed light on the intricacies of Das's writing and the ways in which karma and dharma shape the moral and ethical dimensions of his narratives. By delving into different critical perspectives and interpretations, researchers may uncover hidden layers of meaning and significance in Das's work that have yet to be fully explored. Ultimately, a more diverse and expansive body of scholarship on this topic could enrich our understanding of the profound philosophical themes at play in Das's literary works.

### Conclusion

Manoj Das's stories offer a profound exploration of karma and dharma, illustrating how these Indian philosophical principles shape both the physical and spiritual journeys of his characters. In *A Tiger at Twilight* and *Farewell to a Ghost*, the characters' confrontations with physical challenges are deeply tied to their karmic obligations and moral duties. Das's use of these principles emphasises the inseparable nature of the physical and spiritual realms, where actions in the material world have direct spiritual consequences. Through his stories, Manoj Das highlights the intricate interconnectedness between individual actions and their broader cosmic implications. By delving into the complexities of karma and dharma, he demonstrates how every choice and decision made by his characters ultimately reverberates through the fabric of existence. In doing so, Das invites readers to reflect on their own moral responsibilities and the profound impact of their actions on the world around them. His narratives serve as a poignant reminder that the choices we make are not isolated events but rather threads in the intricate tapestry of life's interconnected web.

Through his exploration of karma and dharma, Das provides a nuanced understanding of morality, spirituality, and personal growth. His stories remind readers that the physical world is not separate from the spiritual but is a space where spiritual lessons are learnt and karmic debts are resolved. In this way, Das's work contributes to a broader understanding of the physical-spiritual dichotomy in Indian literature and invites readers to reflect on the deeper implications of their actions and responsibilities. By weaving together themes of cause and effect, duty, and righteousness, Das invites readers to consider the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of living in harmony with the universe. His stories serve as a gentle reminder that every action has a consequence and every choice we make has an impact not only on ourselves but on the world around us. Through his insightful narratives, Das encourages readers to reflect on their own moral compass and strive for personal growth and spiritual enlightenment in their own lives.

### References

1. Das M. *A Tiger at Twilight*. New Delhi: Penguin India; c1991.
2. Das M. *Farewell to a Ghost*. New Delhi: Penguin India; c1994.
3. Mohanty K. *Manoj Das: The Philosopher Storyteller*.

- Cuttack: Jagannath Rath Publishers; c2001.
4. Dwivedi AN. *Papers on Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Amar Prakashan; c1991.
  5. Iyengar KRS. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers; c1993.
  6. Raja P. *Many Worlds of Manoj Das*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing; c1993.
  7. Paranjape M. Decolonisation and development: Manoj Das and the politics of postcolonial spirituality. *South Asia Review*. 1993;16(2):23–44.
  8. Keating HRF. *Crime and Mystery: The 100 Best Books*. London: Xanadu; c1984.
  9. Lahiri J. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; c1999.
  10. Sen A. *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity*. New Delhi: Penguin Books; c2005.

#### **Creative Commons (CC) License**

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.