



क्षमता विकास आयोग
CAPACITY BUILDING COMMISSION

RESEARCH ARTICLE · APRIL 2026

Dharmic Governance and the Citizen-Centred State

Reclaiming Indian Knowledge Systems for Sustainable and Future-Resilient Capacity Building

RAMASWAMI BALASUBRAMANIAM, MEMBER HR – CAPACITY BUILDING COMMISSION, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
TANUSHREE BHAT, SENIOR CONSULTANT – CAPACITY BUILDING COMMISSION



"India has been dedicated to Gyan Yoga. The thousands-of-years-old Vedas are an inspiration for us even today. Our sages and monks, in accordance with the contemporary times and in the light of the Vedas, continuously developed the systems of that time. From Vedas to Upanishads, from Upanishads to Puranas, Shrutis, Smritis, storytelling, singing – our tradition continued to become empowered through such diverse dimensions."

HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI · SHIKSHAPATRI DWISHATABDI MAHOTSAV · JANUARY 23, 2026

ABSTRACT

India's governance transformation is underway. Across policy design, institutional reform, and civil service capacity building, there is a deepening recognition that the frameworks inherited from a colonial past, however technically functional, must be enriched by the civilisational wisdom that is distinctively India's own. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are beginning to take root in the governance imagination as reflected in the language of Mission Karmayogi, in the National Education Policy's embrace of holistic human development, in the growing acknowledgement that Dharma, Seva, and contextual intelligence are not peripheral to governance but foundational to it. This article seeks to deepen that emerging understanding. Drawing on IKS, it develops the concept of Dharmic Governance, a framework anchored in Nagarik Devo Bhava (the citizen as sacred centre), Seva Bhav (the spirit of selfless public service), Sahakaryata (collaborative action), and Yogakshema (welfare of all). It contends that capacity building for public servants, to be genuinely transformative, must be grounded not only in competencies and digital tools but in the civilisational ethical substrate of India's own knowledge traditions. Such grounding yields a governance model that is contextually intelligent, relationally accountable, morally purposeful, and structurally resilient, and future-ready precisely because it is rooted. The article charts pathways for deepening and institutionalising these principles across training, curriculum, and public administration reform.

Section 01**Introduction: The Unfinished Work of Decolonisation**

India's governance story is one of remarkable and ongoing transformation. From the earliest years of independence, the nation has steadily built institutional capacity, expanded the reach of public services, and deepened democratic accountability, achievements that speak to the dedication and ingenuity of generations of public servants. Yet alongside these achievements, a more reflective conversation has begun to take shape within governance circles. There is a growing recognition that many of the administrative frameworks we continue to rely on, though serviceable in several respects, were inherited from a colonial past and designed for a different purpose and a different civilisational context. They prioritised control over care, procedure over purpose, and hierarchy over harmony, values that sit at odds with India's own civilisational inheritance. The good news is that this recognition is no longer confined to academic discourse. It is alive in policy, in reform, and in the lived aspirations of a civil service

that increasingly seeks to serve not merely efficiently, but meaningfully.

The roots of this transformation are beginning to grow deep and spread wider. Mission Karmayogi¹ has reoriented the civil service toward role-based, values-driven development. The National Education Policy 2020 has restored Indian Knowledge Systems² to their rightful place in the learning imagination. Initiatives across ministries are recovering the wisdom embedded in India's classical traditions of statecraft, ecology, and community governance. What was once at the margins of policy discourse is moving, steadily and with growing institutional confidence, toward the centre. The work of civilisational reclamation in governance is not a distant aspiration; it has already begun, and it is gaining momentum.

This article seeks to contribute to that momentum. The decolonial journey in governance is not a rejection of what has been built; it is its deepening, its enrichment, its completion. The resource India needs for this next stage is not imported; it is indigenous. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), developed across millennia of civilisational experience in statecraft, ethics, ecology, and human development, offer precisely the foundational wisdom that can strengthen and sustain the governance transformation now underway. This article develops that argument through the lens of Dharmic Governance, an approach to public administration grounded in the moral and relational wisdom of India's own traditions, and oriented toward the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision of a confident, capable, and compassionate state.

Section 02

Dharmic Governance: A Framework, Not a Metaphor

The concept of Dharma is perhaps the least understood in contemporary policy discourse. It is frequently reduced to religion, tradition, or cultural sentiment, assigned to the margins of governance rather than recognised as its ethical core. This misreading must be corrected before Indian Knowledge Systems can meaningfully inform public administration.

Dharma, as understood across the Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, and classical philosophical traditions of India, denotes cosmic order, contextual duty, and the moral law that sustains life and society. It is, in governance terms, closest to what contemporary public administration theory calls normative legitimacy, the idea that institutions derive their authority not merely

1. The National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCB) – Mission Karmayogi is a transformative initiative aimed at building a competent civil service deeply rooted in Indian ethos.
2. Indian Knowledge Systems, popularly known as Bharatiya Gyan Parampara, represents India's enduring civilisational knowledge tradition.

from legal sanction but from moral purpose.

The Arthashastra³ of Kautilya,⁴ composed in the fourth century BCE, conveys this principle with profound clarity. The welfare of the subjects is the welfare of the king, and their sorrow is inseparable from his own.⁵ The Tirukkural⁶ echoes this sentiment across a different linguistic tradition. It reminds us that a ruler who fails in duty to the people is like rain that falls on barren stone.⁷

Dharmic Governance insists that governance is not primarily a technical problem but a moral vocation – and that the civil servant is not primarily a rule-implementer but a duty-bearer, embedded in a web of relationships with citizens, communities, the natural world, and future generations.

Dharmic Governance, therefore, is not a theocratic project. It is the application of India's deepest ethical intelligence to the structures of public authority. It insists that governance is not primarily a technical problem but a moral vocation, and that the civil servant is not primarily a rule-implementer but a duty-bearer, embedded in a web of relationships with citizens, communities, the natural world, and future generations. At its heart lies what contemporary scholarship is beginning to recognise as relational capacity:⁸ the quality of trust, mutual recognition, and shared purpose that emerges from everyday interactions between the state and its citizens. This capacity is not codified in manuals or measured in dashboards, yet it determines whether policies translate into lived outcomes. It is built not through directives, but through conduct; not through compliance alone, but through credibility and care.

This framework stands in productive contrast to the dominant technocratic model, which treats governance as an optimisation problem, one that aims to maximise efficiency, minimise variance, and automate delivery. Technocracy is not wrong; it is incomplete. Efficiency without ethics produces systems that are effective at the wrong things. Dharmic Governance does not reject technology; it subordinates it to purpose, using tools in the service of Yogakshema,⁹ the welfare and security of all.

3. Kautilya's compendium on worldly affairs is an ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, politics, economic policy and military strategy.

4. Chanakya, also known as Kautilya or Vishnugupta

5. Kautilya (Chanakya). Arthashastra (~4th century BCE). Trans. R. Shamasastry (1915). Bangalore: Government Press. Book I, Ch. 19: 'In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness; in their welfare his welfare.'

6. The Tirukkural is a classic Tamil language text on commoner's morality consisting of 1,330 short couplets of seven words each.

7. Thiruvalluvar. Tirukkural (~3rd century BCE–5th century CE). Couplets 39–40: 'Of all things, duty (aram) is supreme; the one who abides in it is never troubled.'

8. Honig, D., Krishnamurthy, M., & Karnamadakala Sharma, R. (2025). Relational state capacity: Conceiving of relationships as a core component of society's ability to achieve collective ends (SNF Agora Working Paper 01). Johns Hopkins SNF Agora Institute.

9. Yogakshema is a Sanskrit term meaning the 'acquisition and preservation' of well-being. It combines Yoga (obtaining/gaining) and Kshema (securing/protecting what is gained). Famously used in the Bhagavad Gita (9.22) as 'yogakshemam vahamyaham.'

Section 03

Nagarik Devo Bhava: The Citizen as Sacred Centre

The Vedic aphorism Atithi Devo Bhava, meaning the guest is equivalent to God, captures one of India's most distinctive civilisational instincts. It reflects a recognition of the sacred in the other, especially in those who are vulnerable or dependent. Its governance corollary, Nagarik Devo Bhava,¹⁰ meaning 'revere the citizen as you would a deity', has emerged in recent years as an aspirational organising principle for civil service reform.

This is not a rhetorical flourish. Its implications for governance design are radical. If the citizen is to be received with the reverence or more precisely as a manifestation of the divine, then every touchpoint between state and citizen becomes a site of moral responsibility. The public counter is not a checkpoint; it is an act of hospitality. The grievance mechanism is not a complaint-processor; it is an act of listening. The delivery of a scheme is not a transaction; it is an act of care and compassion.

Contemporary citizen-centricity in public administration theory, as articulated in frameworks from the OECD's 'Government at a Glance' to India's own Digital India mission, tends to frame the citizen as a user, a customer, a rights-holder. These framings are important and have produced real improvements in service delivery. At their core, they remain instrumental in orientation. The citizen is valued because they possess rights, or because their satisfaction becomes a metric of institutional performance.

KEY DISTINCTION

A rule-driven civil servant trained in rights-delivery will comply with procedures. A role-driven civil servant who has internalised Nagarik Devo Bhava will exceed procedures where humanity requires it. The first produces compliance; the second produces care. India needs both, and it has invested admirably in the first while the second remains an area of rich opportunity.

Nagarik Devo Bhava goes further. It grounds citizen-centricity in ontology, not just policy. The citizen matters because of who they are, not only because of what they are entitled to. This distinction is consequential for capacity building: a rule-driven civil servant trained in rights-delivery will comply with procedures; a role-driven civil servant who has internalised

10. Nagarik Devo Bhava — 'The citizen is like God.' Adapted from the Vedic aphorism Atithi Devo Bhava, it has been adopted in public service reform to signify that citizens are to be treated with the highest reverence by state functionaries.

Nagarik Devo Bhava will exceed procedures where humanity requires it. The first produces compliance; the second produces care. India needs both, and it has invested admirably in the first while the second remains an area of rich opportunity.

This principle has found its most visible institutional expression in recent years under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The inauguration of Seva Teerth,¹¹ anchored in the spirit of Nagarik Devo Bhava, was a powerful affirmation that citizen service is not an administrative function but a sacred calling. Similarly, the Karmayogi Saptah, a dedicated week of intensive learning and inner renewal for civil servants across the country, gave this conviction a structured, participatory form. These are not ceremonial gestures; they are declarations of intent that the Indian state will be rebuilt, one public servant at a time, on the foundation of Seva rather than authority.

Operationalising Nagarik Devo Bhava in governance requires attention to what might be called the 'last mile of character', that moment when a public servant encounters a citizen not as a data point or a case file, but as a person. Processes, digital systems, and performance metrics can prepare the conditions for this encounter; they cannot determine its quality. That quality is a function of the inner disposition of the public servant, specifically the Svabhava¹² and Seva Bhav they bring to every encounter.

Section 04

Seva Bhav: Public Service as Moral Vocation

The Indian tradition offers a distinctive understanding of service, seva,¹³ that is philosophically richer than its Western equivalents. In the Bhagavad Gita's framework of Nishkama Karma (action without attachment to its fruits), service is not a job to be performed for reward, recognition, or career advancement. It is a form of yoga, a discipline of self-transcendence through dedicated engagement with the world.

Seva Bhav, the inner orientation of service, is therefore not a soft skill or a personality trait. It is a cultivated moral disposition, developed through practice, reflection, and the kind of inner re-orientation that no skills workshop can produce. It requires that a public servant genuinely regard the act of governance not as the exercise of authority over citizens, but as an

11. Seva Teerth, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 13, 2026, is a new integrated administrative complex in New Delhi housing the PMO, Cabinet Secretariat, and NSCS. Part of the Central Vista project, it symbolises a shift from a 'power' mindset to 'service' (Seva) and duty.
12. Svabhava (Sanskrit: स्वभावः) refers to one's intrinsic nature, inherent disposition, or essential essence.
13. Seva Bhav— the spirit or attitude of selfless service, derived from seva (service) and bhava (inner disposition). In Indian ethical thought, seva is not mere transaction but a mode of being.

opportunity for contribution to their flourishing.

This distinction matters acutely at the implementation frontier. Research on street-level bureaucracy, referring to the discretionary decisions made by frontline officials in the absence of supervisory oversight, consistently finds that outcomes for citizens diverge sharply based not on procedures but on the disposition of the officials they encounter. A functionary with Seva Bhav will apply the spirit of a policy where its letter falls short; will communicate with empathy where rules permit indifference; will find a solution where the system offers only a refusal.

India's Second Administrative Reforms Commission explicitly recognised this,¹⁴ noting that integrity outcomes improve when public servants internalise service as duty rather than perform it as obligation. Yet the training ecosystem has largely responded to integrity challenges by strengthening rules. It has leaned toward more codes, greater vigilance, and expanded compliance training, rather than investing in character formation. The IKS-grounded approach recognises this as a category error. Inner transformation cannot be produced through external regulation alone.

The Rashtriya Karmayogi Jan Seva Programme has reached over two million civil servants across the country – establishing a proof of concept that values-based capacity building, rooted in India's own civilisational knowledge, is both institutionally viable and transformatively powerful.

The Capacity Building Commission has demonstrated, in practice, that this transformation is not merely possible but achievable at scale. The Rashtriya Karmayogi Jan Seva Programme, a large-scale behavioural change initiative grounded in the values of Seva Bhav and public purpose, has reached over two million civil servants across the country. This is not a statistic to be noted in passing; it is evidence that the aspiration to reorient governance around inner purpose and citizen service can be operationalised systematically, across diverse cadres, geographies, and levels of the administrative hierarchy. It establishes a proof of concept that the remainder of this article seeks to deepen. Values-based capacity building, rooted in India's own civilisational knowledge, is both institutionally viable and transformatively powerful.

14. Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2009). Ethics in Governance: Fourth Report. Government of India. The report notes that public servants who internalise service as duty exhibit higher integrity outcomes than those motivated purely by rules.

Seva Bhav, concretely cultivated, requires governance to be understood as Kartavya, meaning duty, rather than Adhikara¹⁵ alone. The rights-based framework is indispensable; citizens must know and exercise their entitlements. But a governance culture rooted only in rights produces adversarial encounters between citizens and the state. A governance culture that also internalises duty, where every functionary understands her role as a moral calling rather than a contractual obligation, produces collaborative encounters grounded in shared purpose.

Section 05

IKS-Grounded Capacity Building: From Competency to Character

5.1 The Competency Paradigm as a Foundation to Strengthen

The shift from rule-based to role-based human resource management in the civil service, with competency frameworks at the centrepiece, represents a genuine and significant advance in governance thinking. By articulating the specific capabilities required for different roles, competency models enable more targeted training, more meaningful performance assessment, and clearer career development pathways. These are substantial contributions, and they have already begun to reshape the culture and self-understanding of the civil service in meaningful ways.

The next frontier for this model, and the invitation that Indian Knowledge System extends, is to integrate competency with character. Competency frameworks, by their nature, describe what a person can do; the deeper question is who a person is becoming through their practice of governance. The quality of governance in its most consequential moments depends not on competency alone, but on its integration with moral clarity, inner steadiness, and relational attunement. IKS offers precisely this deepening framework, one that sees human development not as skill accumulation but as the progressive alignment of action (karma), knowledge (jnana), and being (sattva).¹⁶ Svadhyay, Seva Bhav, and the Panchakosha model do not replace the competency architecture; they give it its fullest meaning and its most durable roots.

5.2 Svadhyay as Foundation

¹⁵. Adhikara is a Sanskrit term broadly conveying entitlement, authority, or rightful scope.

¹⁶. Sattva is a Sanskrit term representing purity, goodness, harmony, and balance. As one of the three gunas, it signifies wisdom, mental clarity, and peace.

Any genuine transformation in governance capacity must begin with Svadhyay,¹⁷ meaning self-study, inner inquiry, and the cultivation of self-knowledge. This is not navel-gazing; it is the recognition that a public servant who does not understand her own motivations, biases, emotional patterns, and relational tendencies cannot be counted upon to serve citizens with consistent fairness, empathy, and integrity. The Karmayogi ideal of the selfless, purposeful civil servant begins with this inner work.

Svadhyay-oriented capacity building would transform training programmes from information-delivery events into reflective learning journeys. Modules would begin not with policy frameworks, but with self-inquiry. Why did you join public service? What do you understand by duty? Who are the citizens you serve, and what does it mean to engage with the spirit of *Nagarik Devo Bhava*? These are not philosophical diversions. They are the foundations on which consistent, values-aligned behaviour is built.

5.3 The Panchakosha Model of Integral Development

The Panchakosha model,¹⁸ articulated in the Taittiriya Upanishad, presents human existence as comprising five interpenetrating dimensions. These span the physical, mental, intellectual, and blissful aspects of the self. Applied to capacity building, this model insists that effective governance capacity cannot be developed by targeting only the intellectual dimension, through knowledge transfer, information modules, and technical training, while ignoring the vital (energy and motivation), mental (emotional regulation and relational skills), and deeper levels of purpose and meaning.

This has direct implications for training design. A Panchakosha-informed curriculum would integrate physical practices that build sustained attention and energy management (Yoga, pranayama); mental and emotional practices that build empathy, self-regulation, and relational intelligence; intellectual practices that engage with IKS-based frameworks for ethics and leadership; and contemplative practices that cultivate a sense of purpose, meaning, and connection to something larger than personal career. Such a curriculum is not an alternative to technical training; it is its integral foundation.

5.4 Desha-Kala-Paristhiti: Contextual Intelligence as Governance Capability

One of the longstanding challenges in large-scale governance systems is the tendency to apply uniform solutions across India's extraordinarily heterogeneous contexts. The IKS

17. Svadhyay– self-study, introspective learning, and inner cultivation. One of the Niyamas in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (II.32), recognising that governance begins with the self-knowledge of the one who governs.

18. Panchakosha model from the Taittiriya Upanishad (2.2–2.5), describing five dimensions of human existence: Annamaya (physical), Pranamaya (vital), Manomaya (mental), Vijnanamaya (intellectual), and Anandamaya (blissful/spiritual).

framework of Desha-Kala-Paristhiti, of contextual wisdom that incorporates place, time, and circumstance, offers a powerful corrective. Capacity building grounded in this principle trains civil servants not just in procedures but in contextual reading, the ability to understand a community's social fabric, its historical relationships with the state, its ecological constraints, its cultural communication norms, before determining how a policy should be implemented.

Crucially, this contextual reading is not only analytical; it is relational. It draws upon and deepens the relational capacity that underpins effective governance, enabling administrators to interpret context not as static data, but as lived experience shaped by trust, memory, and expectation. Policies fail in diverse settings not merely because they are poorly designed, but because they are insufficiently attuned to these relational realities. Where relational capacity is strong, context becomes legible and action gains resonance; where it is weak, even well-calibrated interventions struggle to take root.

Desha-Kala-Paristhiti is, in effect, a sophisticated local knowledge framework, one that IKS has developed over millennia and that modern governance theory is rediscovering under labels such as 'adaptive management', 'contextual governance', and 'community co-production'. The difference is that IKS locates this capacity in the moral and relational formation of the administrator, not merely in data systems and analytical tools. Both are needed; the IKS insight is that the former is foundational to the meaningful use of the latter.

5.5 Living Texts: Ramayana, Arthashastra, Tirukkural, and the Mahabharata as Leadership and Governance Curriculum

A recurring concern in IKS integration is that it risks becoming tokenistic, with Sanskrit terms appearing in PowerPoint slides, ancient texts cited in training preambles, cultural references deployed for aesthetic legitimacy without substantive engagement. The antidote is to treat these texts not as heritage artefacts but as living analytical resources for contemporary governance challenges.

The Arthashastra's analysis of institutional corruption, its framework for accountability mechanisms, and its attention to the alignment between individual incentive and public purpose remain analytically powerful. The Mahabharata's sustained engagement with the tensions between duty and consequence, between personal loyalty and institutional obligation, between the general and the particular, offers a richer ethical curriculum than

most leadership development programmes currently employ. The Tirukkural's couplets on governance, on the qualities of the good ruler, the dangers of pride, and the importance of listening to the governed, are at once ancient and urgently contemporary.

The Ramayana, as the *Adi Kavya*¹⁹ and an *itihasa*,²⁰ offers one of the richest resources for governance and leadership learning. It frames leadership not as a set of innate traits, but as qualities to be cultivated through inner purpose, service, and adherence to dharma. For the civil servant, it serves not as ancient biography, but as a living mirror.

Several of Rama's qualities speak directly to public service, including self-discipline, mastery over impulses, effectiveness in action, strategic consistency, commitment to the welfare of all, and the ability to lead without envy. These are not abstract ideals, but precisely the character foundations that governance reform seeks to build.

THE CHITRAKOOT COUNSEL

When Bharata²² approaches Rama to return and assume the throne, Rama refuses in order to uphold dharma, but not before offering a detailed counsel on governance. What emerges is a remarkably durable philosophy of administration: leadership begins with the right people, chosen for integrity and competence rather than proximity; public resources must be managed as a trust, not as instruments of power; service must be dignified through fair conditions; justice must be impartial; governance must remain anchored in dharmic continuity. Stripped of its narrative form, this reads as a governance framework that remains entirely contemporary.

The symbolic culmination of this exchange lies in the transfer of the *padukas*.²³ Bharata governs not as a ruler, but as a custodian, holding authority in trust rather than in ownership. This establishes a foundational principle of governance, that authority is exercised on behalf of a higher sovereign. For the civil servant, that sovereign is the citizen and the nation.

The implication is direct. Public authority is not possessed, but entrusted. Its legitimacy lies not in assertion, but in alignment with purpose. Governance, in this sense, becomes an act of representation rooted in humility and responsibility.

19. *Adi Kavya* – the first epic poem.

20. *Itihasa* is often understood as 'iti ha asa' – 'thus indeed it was.' It refers to meaningful retellings that preserve truth, values, and lived wisdom.

21. Chitrakoot is a sacred town and forest region on the border of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, deeply revered in the Indian civilisational tradition, especially in connection with the Ramayana.

22. Bharata is the younger half-brother of Lord Rama in the Ramayana, and the regent of Ayodhya during Rama's exile.

23. *Padukas* symbolise the sacred presence of the Guru or the Divine, representing humility, surrender, and alignment with a higher path.

Ramarajya is the idea of a state in which dharma governs every relationship between the ruler and the ruled, where no citizen suffers needlessly, where justice is not merely administered but felt. It is not nostalgia for a mythic golden age. It is a normative horizon, reminding every generation of public servants what they are ultimately working toward.

The larger vision that emerges is that of Ramarajya. It is often translated simply as the kingdom of Rama, but its meaning reaches far beyond a particular monarch or a particular era. Ramarajya is the idea of a state in which dharma governs every relationship between the ruler and the ruled, where no citizen suffers needlessly, where justice is not merely administered but felt, and where those who hold authority understand themselves to be servants of the people's welfare rather than masters of their fate. It is, in essence, the fully realised form of everything this article has sought to argue, with Nagarik Devo Bhava as lived reality, Seva Bhav as institutional culture, and Yogakshema as a measurable outcome. Ramarajya is not nostalgia for a mythic golden age. It is a normative horizon, a standard of governance that reminds every generation of public servants what they are ultimately working toward. When a civil servant treats a citizen with care, examines a case without prejudice, distributes resources with fairness, or places the public interest above personal convenience, they are not merely performing a function. They are, in their own small and consequential way, building Ramarajya.

Capacity building that engages these texts through case-based pedagogy, role-play, and reflective dialogue, asking what Kautilya would recommend for a given implementation challenge and what Bharata's example teaches about the ethics of representing others, creates the kind of living ethical engagement that transforms professional culture over time.

Section 06

Sahakaryata: Collaborative Governance and the Wisdom of Plurality

The IKS principle of Sahakaryata,²⁴ collaborative action and cooperative endeavour, has deep roots in India's civilisational experience. From village commons managed through collective norms (gram sabhas, water user communities) to the guild systems that regulated trade and craft across centuries, India has a rich institutional history of distributed governance, with knowledge and decision-making power shared across communities rather than concentrated in centralised hierarchies.

This tradition offers a powerful counter to the default tendency of large governance systems toward siloing and concentration. A Sahakaryata-informed governance framework would treat community knowledge not as supplementary data to be collected by the state, but as primary intelligence that should shape programme design, implementation, and evaluation. Indigenous communities, grassroots practitioners, and local knowledge-holders would be recognised as co-producers of governance solutions, not merely as programme beneficiaries.

Central to this vision is the principle of plural epistemologies, the recognition that India's communities carry living knowledge systems in architecture, agriculture, water management, dispute resolution, and medicinal practice that are not informal alternatives to formal governance, but sophisticated bodies of knowledge developed through millennia of contextual observation and collective refinement. A governance system rooted in Sahakaryata would actively legitimise and integrate this knowledge into mainstream planning and administration: bringing traditional water harvesting intelligence into watershed management programmes, drawing on indigenous dispute resolution practices in the design of community justice mechanisms, incorporating ecological knowledge of local farming communities into agricultural policy. This is not a romanticisation of the past; it is the recovery of proven, place-specific intelligence that the colonial administrative inheritance systematically marginalised and that modern governance systems are only beginning to rediscover.

In capacity building terms, Sahakaryata demands that training move beyond the classroom and the iGOT²⁵ platform into immersive community engagement, or what the IKS tradition calls yatra, the intentional journey into unfamiliar terrain for the purpose of learning and transformation. Civil servants who have lived in communities practicing traditional water harvesting systems, or participated in gram sabha deliberations on forest rights, or observed village-level dispute resolution mechanisms rooted in customary law, carry a contextual intelligence that no module can manufacture.

24. Sahakaryata– collaborative action, cooperative endeavour. Rooted in the Vedic concept of Sanghe Shakti Kaliyuge ('strength is in unity in the age of Kali'), it forms the basis of Indian approaches to cooperative federalism and community governance.

Section 07

Yogakshema: Toward Future-Resilient and Sustainable Governance

The Bhagavad Gita's concept of Yogakshema,²⁶ the welfare and security of all, provides Dharmic Governance with its ultimate normative horizon. Unlike utilitarian frameworks that aggregate welfare by maximising the greatest good for the greatest number, often at the expense of the most vulnerable, Yogakshema insists on the inclusion of all. It encompasses the marginalised, the future-born, and the non-human. This is an intrinsically intergenerational and ecological vision of governance.

What gives Yogakshema particular depth as a governance concept is that it does not belong to a single text or tradition within IKS; it appears across India's civilisational canon in ways that reinforce and enrich each other. The Bhagavad Gita invokes it as an expression of divine care for all beings, but Kautilya's Arthashastra, composed as a practical manual of statecraft, employs the same compound with equal precision. In the Arthashastra, yoga refers to the acquisition or attainment of what one does not yet have, and kshema refers to the preservation and security of what one already possesses. Together, they describe the complete duty of the state toward its people; not merely to deliver welfare to those who lack it, but to protect and sustain the welfare of those who have attained it. This is a remarkably sophisticated understanding of state responsibility, one that encompasses both distributive justice and the protection of existing wellbeing, and that anticipates by millennia the modern distinction between development and resilience. Kautilya makes the stakes explicit when he writes that in the happiness of the subjects lies the happiness of the king, and in their welfare his welfare. Yogakshema is not, in this reading, an aspiration. It is the primary measure by which governance succeeds or fails.

The sustainability imperative that confronts twenty-first century governance, including climate resilience, ecological preservation, and intergenerational equity, finds a deeper grounding in Yogakshema than in purely technocratic sustainability frameworks. IKS offers governance a civilisational memory of living within ecological limits. Traditional forest governance systems such as Van Panchayats, sacred groves such as Devaravanas, water harvesting architectures including step-wells, johads,²⁷ and kuls,²⁸ and seasonal agricultural

25. iGOT (Integrated Government Online Training) Karmayogi is a comprehensive digital learning platform for 2.0 crore Indian government employees. Launched under Mission Karmayogi, it provides targeted training, competency mapping, and professional development.

26. Yogakshema — the welfare and security of all. The Bhagavad Gita (9.22) uses this term to imply the state's responsibility to ensure both acquisition (yoga) and preservation (kshema) of the well-being of its citizens.

practices reflect millennia of distributed ecological intelligence embedded in cultural life.

Integrating this intelligence into public administration is not nostalgia; it is strategic intelligence. In the context of climate adaptation, where hyper-local ecological knowledge is often more accurate than satellite data, and where community engagement is more reliable than top-down enforcement, IKS-based governance frameworks offer practical superiority, and not merely cultural authenticity.

Future-resilient governance, understood through the Yogakshema lens, is governance that is morally accountable to those who do not yet have a voice, including future generations, marginalised communities, and the natural world. Building this accountability into civil service culture calls for long-horizon thinking, ecological sensitivity, and ethical depth, all of which IKS-grounded capacity building is designed to nurture.

Section 08

Pathways for Institutional Integration

The transformation advocated here is systemic, not supplementary. Embedding Dharmic Governance principles across India's governance architecture requires a multi-pronged strategy operating simultaneously at the levels of policy, curriculum, pedagogy, and research.

- Policy Alignment: National flagship frameworks, including the National Education Policy 2020, Mission Karmayogi, and the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, already provide enabling architecture for IKS integration. What is needed is not mere acknowledgement, but deeper engagement. IKS principles must be explicitly recognised as the ethical foundation of governance reform, rather than treated as a cultural complement to technocratic modernisation.
- Curriculum Redesign: Public administration training, from induction programmes at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration to foundational and mid-career programmes at Central Training Institutes, should integrate IKS-based ethics, leadership, and contextual intelligence as core content rather than elective offerings. The Panchakosha model should inform the holistic design of training interventions.

27. Johads are traditional, crescent-shaped earthen check dams used in arid regions of India, primarily Rajasthan, to harvest rainwater and recharge groundwater.

28. Kuls (or kuhls) are traditional small-scale diversion channels found in mountainous regions of Himachal Pradesh, directing water from glaciers to agricultural fields and villages.

- **Pedagogical Innovation:** The shift from information delivery to transformative learning requires new pedagogical forms. These include Svadhyay-based reflective journals, immersive yatras in communities practicing Indic models of self-governance, case-based engagement with classical texts, and diagnostic tools rooted in Svabhava frameworks that help individuals understand their inner dispositions and learning edges.
- **Research and Knowledge Production:** IKS Chairs and Centres of Excellence, working in partnership with institutions like TISS and the Capacity Building Commission, should produce contextualised governance research that brings IKS frameworks into analytical dialogue with contemporary implementation challenges, not as heritage studies but as living governance intelligence.
- **Community Co-Creation:** Indigenous communities, grassroots movements, and local knowledge practitioners must be recognised as co-owners of governance knowledge, brought into programme design processes not as data sources but as knowledge partners, ensuring that institutional wisdom and lived wisdom are in continuous productive dialogue.

Section 09

Conclusion: Swaraj in Thinking as the Foundation of Governance

India's governance future cannot be built on epistemological foundations designed for a different civilisation's purposes. The decolonial task of the twenty-first century lies not in rejecting modernity, but in reinterpreting it. It calls for the recovery of India's cognitive sovereignty and a renewed confidence that our own ways of knowing are not only culturally meaningful, but better aligned to the governance of a society that is diverse, ecologically grounded, and profoundly relational.

Dharmic Governance, grounded in Nagarik Devo Bhava, animated by Seva Bhav, structured through Sahakaryata, and oriented toward Yogakshema, offers precisely this reframing. It is not a rejection of competency, digital infrastructure, or evidence-based policy. It is their moral grounding. It is the insistence that all of these tools be deployed in the service of human flourishing, contextual wisdom, and intergenerational responsibility.

Capacity building that internalises these principles will produce civil servants who are not merely skilled but wise; not merely efficient but purposeful; not merely rule-compliant but ethically alive. These are the qualities that determine the quality of governance in its most consequential moments i.e. at the last mile, in the discretionary decision, in the encounter between a vulnerable citizen and a state functionary who has the power to help or to harm.

When civil servants begin with Svadhyay, act with Seva Bhav, read context through Desha-Kala-Paristhiti, collaborate through Sahakaryata, and remain accountable to Yogakshema, governance transforms from a mechanistic system into a living ethic. That transformation is the Swaraj²⁹ of the twenty-first century, not merely political or administrative, but civilisational and cognitive. The time has come not merely to teach Indian Knowledge Systems, but to govern through them.

“When civil servants begin with Svadhyay, act with Seva Bhav, read context through Desha-Kala-Paristhiti, collaborate through Sahakaryata, and remain accountable to Yogakshema – governance transforms from a mechanistic system into a living ethic. That transformation is the Swaraj of the twenty-first century.”

Balasubramaniam & Bhat – Dharmic Governance and the Citizen-Centred State, 2026

29. Swaraj is a Sanskrit term meaning 'self-rule' or 'self-governance,' pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi to signify not just independence from British rule but comprehensive self-reliance, self-discipline, and political freedom.