

LA MARTINIÈRE MODEL UNITED NATIONS, 2023



THE DECENNIAL EDITION

UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

BACKGROUND GUIDE

PRINTABLE FORMAT

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CONTENTS

1. Letter from the Executive Board
2. How to prepare for this MUN?
3. Introduction to the United Nations Environment Programme
4. Overview of the Agenda and Research Questions
5. Examples of Indigenous Concepts
6. Research Questions

NOTE

This background guide has been compiled from various sources for educational purposes. The authors do not claim intellectual rights over the content, and it should not be quoted or cited as a scholarly source. Its sole intention is to provide educational guidance in MUN simulations. It does not constitute original scholarship but rather serves as a practical resource for MUN participants seeking guidance in their deliberations and discussions.

Letter from the Executive Board

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the simulation of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) at the La Martiniere Model United Nations 2023. A Model UN is an amazing learning opportunity and we hope that we have a fruitful time together discussing the agenda and brainstorming various issues. A Model UN conference gives you the opportunity to step in the shoes of diplomats who zealously represent their countries. It gives you a sneak peek into the world of multilateral diplomacy which entails weeks or even month-long meetings, drafting of resolutions and treaties, round-the-clock lobbying, and much more. Students participate in Model UN conferences for various reasons. Although learning about global issues may not feature as one of the top reasons for their participation, it is undoubtedly the most important take-away.

In today's inter-connected world, whether you are/wish to be a government official, businessperson, lawyer, management professional, engineer or part of any other profession, you simply cannot get by without a nuanced understanding of global politics. If there ever was such a time when you could, although we highly doubt it, it's long gone. A Model UN simulation is just the right place to start learning about this field for any school student. The UN may have become inconsequential to global politics, but its simulation can teach us a lot about historical and contemporary global realities. It can be a great lesson in power politics, world history, globalization and its effects, decision-making, and much more.



At the core of our collective endeavour lies an agenda of paramount importance: ‘Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Posthumanist Approaches to promote sustainable development.’

We understand that the language of global politics can sometimes be complex, so let's break down the significance of this agenda in simpler terms:

- **Indigenous Knowledge Systems:**

Indigenous knowledge systems encompass a wide array of wisdom and insights that have been passed down through generations (including about the environment). These encompass a broader understanding of ‘indigenous’, which includes often-overlooked concepts and philosophies such as Dharma (in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism), Tao, Ubuntu, Pachamama, and more.

The term ‘indigenous’ traditionally referred to the original inhabitants of a specific region or land, often with a focus on the descendants of pre-colonial or pre-settler societies.

However, here, we are interpreting the concept of ‘indigenous’ in a much broader and more inclusive manner. In this broader interpretation, ‘indigenous’ encompasses not only those who are descendants of pre-colonial peoples but also various marginalized and historically oppressed communities/worldviews/knowledge systems worldwide.

Many indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in the deep connections between people, nature, and the cosmos. By embracing these diverse and rich belief systems, we aim to weave a tapestry of holistic and harmonious approaches to environmental stewardship.



These teachings offer profound guidance on sustainable development and remind us of the interconnectedness of all life forms, encouraging us to tread gently on the planet while fostering our collective well-being. We will learn more about this in further parts of this guide.

- **Posthumanism:**

Posthumanism encourages us to look beyond our immediate human concerns and adopt a holistic perspective. It advocates for considering the well-being of the entire planet, encompassing all living creatures and the environment itself in our decision-making processes. It can be defined as an approach that propositions an inclusive account of the importance of not just the human actors but also the non-human actors in global political life, such as nature, earth's processes, plant and animal systems, and so on.

- **Promoting Sustainable Development:**

Sustainable development is about progress that does not compromise the well-being of the environment or future generations. In other words, it's about finding ways to make our world better without causing harm or depletion.

Engaging with this agenda becomes even more crucial when we consider the broader context of 'politics of knowledge production' and 'Eurocentrism' in social sciences. Let us quickly introduce you to the concepts of 'politics of knowledge production' and 'Eurocentrism'. 'Politics of knowledge production' refers to the social, cultural, and political factors that influence how knowledge is created, disseminated, and valued within society.



It encompasses the idea that knowledge is not neutral but is shaped by power dynamics, cultural biases, and institutional structures. Following this, 'Eurocentrism' is a worldview or bias that centers on Europe, particularly Western Europe, and regards European culture, history, and values as superior or as the universal standard by which other cultures and societies are measured.

It often leads to the prioritization of European perspectives, experiences, and knowledge over those of other regions or cultures, marginalizing non-European or non-Western worldviews and contributing to cultural and intellectual domination. In the context of Eurocentrism in social sciences, it refers to a historical bias where Western European ideas and methods were considered the norm and often imposed as the standard in academic disciplines. This Eurocentric perspective has been criticized for neglecting or misrepresenting the experiences, knowledge, and contributions of non-European cultures and societies as it has practical consequences that extend far beyond academia.

It can lead to the marginalization and erasure of non-European cultures and their unique contributions to art, literature, music, philosophy, and other forms of cultural expression. This can result in a homogenized global culture that fails to appreciate the richness and diversity of human creativity. Eurocentric historical narratives often distort the experiences and achievements of non-European civilizations. This distortion can perpetuate stereotypes, downplay the impact of colonization and imperialism, and reinforce a skewed understanding of global history. The misrepresentation of non-European cultures can perpetuate stereotypes and biases, contributing to social injustice, discrimination, and racism.



It can affect the lived experiences of individuals from these cultures and hinder social cohesion and understanding. In academic and practical fields, Eurocentric biases can create knowledge gaps where valuable insights and solutions from non-European perspectives are overlooked. This has practical consequences in areas such as medicine, environmental science, and social policy, where diverse viewpoints are essential for addressing complex challenges effectively. This Eurocentric bias has long marginalized or even excluded indigenous perspectives, perpetuating a skewed understanding of sustainability and development.

Historically, Eurocentrism has positioned Western knowledge systems as the universal norm, neglecting the rich, diverse, and deeply rooted indigenous knowledge systems that have thrived for centuries across the globe. This Eurocentric bias has not only hindered the recognition of indigenous wisdom but has also often led to the imposition of Western development models on indigenous communities, with detrimental consequences for both the environment and the people.

Neglecting indigenous knowledge systems, as a consequence of Eurocentrism, can result in the loss of valuable insights into sustainable living, resource management, and environmental conservation. This has practical implications for addressing pressing global environmental challenges.

Integrating indigenous knowledge systems represents a necessary shift away from Eurocentric thinking. It challenges the dominant narratives and opens the door to a more inclusive and equitable approach to sustainable development. By acknowledging the significance of indigenous knowledge, we rectify historical injustices, valuing and incorporating perspectives that have been overlooked for far too long.



Moreover, this agenda seeks to democratize the process of generating knowledge and understanding. By giving voice to indigenous communities and their knowledge, we promote not only cultural preservation but also empowerment. Indigenous peoples have a right to determine their own sustainable development pathways, and integrating their wisdom into global efforts acknowledges their agency and self-determination.

This shift recognizes that indigenous communities often have a more profound relationship with the environment, rooted in spirituality and respect for all living beings, which can offer valuable insights into ecological balance and sustainable coexistence. Adopting this posthumanist approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and the environment itself, transcending Eurocentric anthropocentrism, a viewpoint that argues that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world.

Further parts of this guide will equip you to understand this research agenda more comprehensively. As you must have noticed while glancing through the index, this guide is divided into four sections. The first is this letter.

The second titled “How to prepare for this MUN?” is a step-by-step guide to help you start with your preparation.

The purpose of the third section “Introduction to the United Nations Environment Programme” is self-explanatory. The fourth/last section contains an overview of the agenda and research questions.



You must aim to build a strong foundation before you dive into your agenda-based research. The second and third sections will help you do just that.

We hope that you consider this simulation a starting point towards becoming a more informed individual; somebody who appreciates the complexity of the world we live in. As members of the Executive Board, we are genuinely excited to embark on this meaningful journey with you. Please feel free to contact us in case you need any help!

With Warm Regards,

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How to prepare for this MUN?

Preparation for a Model UN conference involves a few simple steps. Now, before we lay out these steps, we would recommend any MUN first-timer reading this guide to conduct a Google search and read some basic introductions to Model UN before proceeding further with this guide. Some good sources include: Best Delegate and UN Guide to Model UN. In addition to this, watching some YouTube videos of MUN simulations will also be helpful.

Circling back to the preparation steps, these are as follows:

Step 1: Building a proper foundation

You must begin by reading the introduction provided in Section 3 and follow it up with the recommended links which will introduce you to UNEP's role, structure, history, and potential.

At this point, if you are interested, you may also start learning about the discipline of International Relations (conventionally abbreviated as 'IR'). These introductory textbooks (freely available online) by 'E-International Relations' are great places to start for a beginner/school student:

- International Relations edited by Stephen McGlinchey:
<https://www.e-ir.info/publication/beginners-textbook-international-relations/>
- Understanding Global Politics by Kevin Bloor:
<https://www.e-ir.info/publication/understanding-global-politics/>



'E-International Relations' is one of the most reputed website and open-access publisher in IR, and is frequented by students, scholars, and teachers alike. You can start by reading first few chapters and then proceed depending on your appetite. Reading IR will help you in understanding the intricacies of world politics. You will be able to recognize how all issues are highly interconnected and global. This is of course a long process, which if you are interested, you must continue after this conference as well. Please note that this is merely a suggestion and in no way a compulsory activity.

Doing pain-staking research at this stage may seem a waste of time, but we promise that you will be able to recognize its benefits during the conference and long after that.

Step 2: Country-based pre-agenda research

Once you have received your allotments, you should start doing general research on your country. Learn about its:

- Government and politics (structure of polity, decision-making institutions, foreign policy elites, etc.);
- Economy (GDP, industries, international trade, foreign aid, etc.);
- Religion and Culture;
- Status in international power configuration and factors responsible for it (whether it is a great, middle or a small power? And Why?);
- Standing in important multilateral institutions (UN, World Bank, IMF, WTO, etc.);
- History with UNEP
- Stance on important environmental issues
- ☒Geography (location, neighbours, resources, etc.);



Step 3: Agenda-based research

- A quick breakdown of the agenda – definition of important terms and the rationale behind discussing it has been covered in the ‘Letter from the Executive Board’. Kindly read those parts of the letter once again. After that, move to Section 4.
- Section 4 contains a discussion on two indigenous concepts – Dharma and Pachamama. However in your research, you must not limit yourself to these two concepts, as their only aim is to initiate you into this topic. Instead, you should explore indigenous concepts/worldviews/knowledge systems in your allotted country as well as others.
- Apart from the discussion on the indigenous concepts, Section 4 also contains a carefully curated list of 10 research questions. These questions would act as sub-topics in your committee deliberations. You are advised to conduct your research in accordance to these questions.



Introduction to the United Nations Environment Programme

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) stands as the foremost global authority dedicated to addressing critical environmental issues. UNEP's overarching mission revolves around the aspiration to inspire, inform, and empower nations and communities across the world to enhance their quality of life while upholding the well-being of future generations.

For over half a century, UNEP has steadfastly collaborated with governments, civil society, the private sector, and various United Nations entities, jointly tackling humanity's most urgent and complex environmental challenges. These efforts have spanned a wide range of initiatives, from the restoration of the ozone layer to the preservation of the world's oceans and the promotion of an equitable, sustainable green economy.

UNEP remains at the forefront of driving transformative change, delving deep into the fundamental causes of the triple planetary crisis encompassing climate change, the loss of biodiversity and nature, and pollution. UNEP's comprehensive agenda revolves around assisting nations in their transition towards low-carbon, resource-efficient economies, fortifying environmental governance and legal frameworks, safeguarding critical ecosystems, and providing well-founded, data-driven insights to guide informed policy-making decisions. In doing so, UNEP actively contributes to the global pursuit of a more harmonious and sustainable relationship between humanity and the environment.



UNEP maintains a steadfast and close partnership with its extensive network of 193 Member States, collaborating closely with representatives from various segments of society, including civil society, businesses, and other significant groups and stakeholders. This collaborative effort is channelled through the UN Environment Assembly, which stands as the preeminent and highest-level decision-making body worldwide dedicated to addressing environmental challenges.

Within the framework of the UN Environment Assembly, UNEP orchestrates a convergence of perspectives, insights, and expertise from its Member States and diverse stakeholders. Together, they deliberate and devise strategies, policies, and solutions aimed at mitigating the multifaceted environmental challenges facing our planet. This inclusive approach reflects UNEP's commitment to fostering global cooperation and synergy to ensure that the world's environmental issues are effectively confronted and resolved.

The organization is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya and it is led by a senior management team that's chaired by an Executive Director.

They work through a set number of divisions, regional and country offices and more than a dozen Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Conventions, Secretariats and Collaborating Centres of Excellence.

Mandate

The UNEP was established by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2997 (XXVII) on December 15, 1972, during the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which took place in Stockholm, Sweden.



This resolution provided the formal framework and mandate for UNEP's operations and set the stage for its role as the global authority on environmental matters within the United Nations system.

Resolution 2997 (XXVII) articulated the need for a dedicated United Nations body to address environmental issues on a global scale, recognizing the increasing importance of environmental concerns.

It established UNEP with the mission to promote international cooperation and address environmental challenges, and it marked a significant milestone in the international community's commitment to environmental protection and sustainability.

Since its inception, UNEP has played a crucial role in advancing environmental conservation and addressing global environmental challenges. It is charged with a diverse and vital mandate centred on environmental sustainability. Its core mission encompasses inspiring and empowering nations and individuals to prioritize environmental well-being while safeguarding the interests of future generations. UNEP's role extends to gathering and disseminating crucial environmental knowledge, equipping decision-makers with evidence-based data.

UNEP can conduct research, provide evidence-based policy guidance, facilitate international coordination, contribute to the development and implementation of environmental agreements, offer capacity-building support, strengthen environmental governance, advocate for environmental protection, administer funding mechanisms, monitor global environmental trends, and provide advisory assistance, collectively enabling it to lead global efforts in addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainability.



For more information on the UNEP, please consult the following links:

- Short Introduction by Britannica Encyclopaedia:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Environment-Programme>

- Book Chapter titled 'UNEP: The Past and Potential of a Global Environmental Institution' in The Untold Story of the World's Leading Environmental Institution: UNEP at Fifty (2021, MIT Press) by Maria Ivanova

<https://direct.mit.edu/books/oa-monograph/5027/chapter/2961184/UNEP-The-Past-and-Potential-of-a-Global>



Overview of the Agenda and Research Questions

The 'Letter from the Executive Board' introduced you to the agenda – elaborating upon important terms and discussing the rationale for its adoption. Here, we will follow-up on those discussions.

The 'Posthuman' and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

As discussed previously, Posthumanism encourages us to look beyond our immediate human concerns and adopt a holistic perspective. It advocates for considering the well-being of the entire planet, encompassing all living creatures and the environment itself in our decision-making processes. It is as an approach that propositions an inclusive account of the importance of not just the human actors but also the non-human actors in global political life, such as nature, earth's processes, plant and animal systems, and so on.

Indigenous knowledge systems, on the other hand, are culturally specific bodies of knowledge, practices, beliefs and wisdom that have been developed and passed down through generations within such communities. These beliefs may or may not have universal application and be fundamentally complex, however they usually encapsulate an array of ecological, social and spiritual knowledge, which is rooted in the connections that these communities have with their lands and environments. These systems provide insights on everything, ranging from sustainable resource management and agriculture to medicine and other such avenues.



Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge has informed how to practically ensure the balance of the environment in which they live so it may continue to provide essential services – such as water, fertile soil, food, shelter, medicines – to all life forms.

The conventional definition of 'indigenous' peoples typically refers to communities, ethnic groups, or societies that have a historical, cultural, and ancestral connection to a specific geographic region. They are often characterized by having distinct languages, traditions, belief systems, and social structures that are deeply rooted in their traditional lands.

Indigenous peoples are typically recognized as the original inhabitants of a particular area, predating colonial or external settlement. Examples of indigenous peoples around the world include:

- **Native Americans/First Nations (North America):** Indigenous peoples in North America, including the Navajo Nation, Cherokee Nation, and many others, have inhabited the continent for thousands of years. They have unique languages, cultural practices, and governance systems.
- **Maori (New Zealand):** The Maori people are the indigenous people of New Zealand, known for their rich cultural heritage, including the haka dance and traditional Maori language (Te Reo Maori).
- **Aboriginal Australians:** Aboriginal peoples in Australia have a diverse range of cultures, languages, and traditions, with connections to their ancestral lands dating back tens of thousands of years.
- **Inuit (Arctic regions):** The Inuit people are indigenous to the Arctic regions of North America and Greenland. .



They have a distinct way of life, including traditional hunting and fishing practices

- **Sámi (Northern Europe):** The Sami are the indigenous people of northern Europe, primarily inhabiting areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. They have a unique culture, language, and relationship with the Arctic environment.
- **Tribal peoples in India:** India is home to numerous indigenous groups, such as the Adivasis, who have distinct languages, traditions, and spiritual beliefs deeply tied to their ancestral lands.
- **Amazon Rainforest Indigenous Peoples:** The Amazon rainforest is inhabited by various indigenous communities, including the Yanomami, Kayapo, and many others, each with their own languages and sustainable ways of living in the rainforest.

These examples represent only a fraction of the diverse indigenous peoples found worldwide. Indigenous communities often face challenges related to land rights, cultural preservation, and socio-economic disparities, and their recognition and protection are essential for preserving cultural diversity and promoting their well-being.

You can check out this interesting article by Leslie E. Sponsel, which discusses this issue with regards to the Amazonian Yanomami:

<https://www.e-ir.info/2023/09/27/amazonian-yanomami-a-sustainable-green-society-attacked/>



Circling back to the topic at hand, the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and posthumanist approaches is crucial for promoting a more inclusive, sustainable and culturally sensitive approach to addressing global environmental challenges and fostering equitable development worldwide. Recognizing and valuing the wisdom and perspectives of indigenous peoples and embracing a posthumanist ethic can lead to innovative solutions and a more harmonious coexistence with our planet.

However, for the purposes of this simulation, we will discuss adhere to a broader understanding of ‘indigenous’.

This includes often-overlooked concepts and philosophies such as Dharma (in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism), Tao, Ubuntu, Pachamama, and more. The term ‘indigenous’ traditionally referred to the original inhabitants of a specific region or land, often with a focus on the descendants of pre-colonial or pre-settler societies.

However, here, we are interpreting the concept of ‘indigenous’ in a much broader and more inclusive manner. In this broader interpretation, ‘indigenous’ encompasses not only those who are descendants of pre-colonial peoples but also various marginalized and historically oppressed communities/worldviews/knowledge systems worldwide.

No doubt, most content available online will adhere to the conventional definition of the ‘indigenous’ discussed before. But the broader definition, enunciated in this guide is reflective of recent scholarly debates, and you must use this as the base for further research.



To give you some clarity, the next section will elaborate upon two indigenous concepts: Pachamama and Dharma; post which, we will leave you with 10 research questions. This guide has provided you with general direction and a conceptual toolkit to contextualise your research. It is in no way exhaustive. Now, you must begin your own research!



Examples of Indigenous Concepts

Dharma

Sources: *Giorgio Shani and Navnita Chadha Behera. 2022. "Provincialising International Relations through a Reading of Dharma." Review of International Studies, 48 (5). Cambridge University Press: 837–56. & Tamara A Trowsell, Arlene B Tickner, Amaya Querejazu, Jarrad Reddekop, Giorgio Shani, Kosuke Shimizu, Navnita Chadha Behera, Anahita Arian, Differing about Difference: Relational IR from around the World, International Studies Perspectives, 22 1, February 2021, pp. 25–64.*

All the major indigenous religious traditions in India can trace their roots in the cosmic, moral social order of dharma. Dharma is constitutive of modern Indian cosmologies along with Islam, and is widely considered to be the 'root paradigm' of all the major ancient Indic religious traditions – Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism – in India. A common, albeit critical, misconception however, has been to identify dharma exclusively with Hinduism and, furthermore, to translate dharma as religion.

This has led to a series of foundational errors, including the equation of the entire Indian cosmological tradition with the term 'Hindu'. Significantly, the word 'Hindu' itself is not to be found in any of the ancient or even medieval Indian texts. Indeed, postcolonial scholarship has tended to regard Hinduism as a product of European Orientalism, which conceptualised the diverse cosmological practices and beliefs of Indian peoples into an integrated coherent religion called 'Hinduism'.



The correct term to refer to the ancient Indian cosmological tradition is therefore 'dharmic'. The etymology of the word dharma is derived from the root dhr, which denotes the meanings of 'to hold, to support, to uphold, to sustain, to preserve, to maintain'.

A concept of multiple connotations, dharma includes cosmological, ethical, social, and legal principles, which make up the foundation of an ordered universe. It has a precursor in the Rta of the Vedas. Rta signifies the cosmic order, which rules the regularity of the cosmic processes such as the rising and setting of the sun, the cycle of the seasons, springtime, and harvest, as well as the universe itself.

In Vedic cosmogony, the verb principally refers to 'the supporting ($\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$) of the sky, the holding apart ($\text{vi-}\sqrt{\text{dhr}}$) of the earth and sky and cosmos'. The term dharma is, however, not central to the R̥gvedic lexicon and even less so in the later Vedic texts.

In the Atharvaveda Samhitā, dhárman is found as an instrument of a god, understood as a divine law though it also marks the transition of dhárman to dharma, as it began to constitute the building blocks of a sociological foundation and, also get identified with kingship in terms of the role of the king in establishing order and exercising jurisprudence.

Dharma does not have a pivotal role in the later Vedic texts of older Upanishads either though the foundational meaning of dharma as 'support' perseveres. It acquires a centrality only in the dharamsūtras and later, the dharmashāstras that codified the behaviour of individuals with a detailed characterisation of their social rules, duties, obligations, customs, and laws encapsulated in the idea of varna-āsharma-dharma (often equated with the caste system).



The rigidity of such social rules, giving rise to practices of social discrimination were, however, strongly challenged by the Jain and Buddhist traditions of dharma, the latter conceptualised as dhamma (Pali word for Dharma). Indeed the immense popular appeal of Buddhism was because it offered freedom from the yoke of varna and jātī, in that: ‘the true brāhmaṇa, the true ārya, is not someone who is born as such and performs the duties and rites – the dharmas – laid down in the Vedas, the real ariya-puggala or ‘noble person’ is the one who takes up the practices – the dhammas – recommended by the Buddha and roots out greed, hatred and delusion.’

Dhammas are the fundamental qualities, both mental and physical, that in some sense support and maintain the experience or reality in its entirety. In Jainism too, dharma broadly incorporates both ‘the idea of behaviour that accords with moral rules and virtues (pravrttidharma) and the idea of behaviour that accords with one’s intrinsic nature (nivrttidharma)’.

By the end of the medieval period, Jainism had also embraced the idea of dharma as a universal or cosmic order, governing all activity in the cosmos. Additionally, it should be noted that it is dharma—understood within the Sikh tradition as dharam—which constitutes individuals and the world(s) they inhabit.

According to Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, the universe is sustained by dharma (although they differ on its understanding, as indicated above). Dharma binds human beings to each other and to the universe.



The main concern of Dharma, according to the Mahābhārata, is with the universal foundations of human life and human relationships because the quality of human life in the personal as well as the social domain depends on the quality of relationships a human has with the self and, of the self with the other. In the dharmic view, the two are not separate.

That is because only when one's relationship with the self is 'right', can one's relationships with others be considered 'right', and it is not until one attains a 'right' relationship with others, that one's relationship with the self can be considered 'right'. The 'others', it is important to note though, 'include not only living human beings, but also ancestors, gods, plants, animals, earth, sky, and so on.

The concept is wide enough to include all realms where the "other" happens to be an empirical "other" with whom one can enter into a relationship.' In a radical departure from the dharmashāstras, The Mahābhārata discards the narrow and sectarian idea of dharma and retrieves its principal idea: a reality in which everything, all life, is supported, sustained, and enhanced.

The fundamental tenet of dharma, Mahābhārata says, is:

"All the sayings of dharma are with a view to nurturing, cherishing, providing more amply, endowing more richly, prospering, increasing, enhancing, all living beings; securing their prabhava. Therefore, whatever has the characteristic of bringing that about is dharma. This is certain."

In the social context, dharma is the foundation of the good life that entails a rational pursuit of economic and political goals (artha) as well as pleasure (kama).



Karma, which is the application of dharma to individual action, in turn determines the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). Dharma does not deny the reality of primary human impulses to seek pleasure, to acquire, and even control others. It affirms, however, the principle that it is important to understand the true place of everything.

So, wealth should be earned without doing violence to others and, what is earned should be shared with others. In other words, ‘the happiness of the other is an essential condition of one’s own happiness. This is the ultimate foundation of the human order.’

Mahābhārata states:

“He alone is in unity with dharma who has compassion towards all beings, is open and straightforward in his relations with others, and looks upon all beings as his own.”

No singular set of prescriptions is ordained for the conduct of social life given the varied and complex nature of human beings. Every individual should be able to order one’s life according to one’s temperament, capacity, and circumstances. Put simply, for every person there is a code of conduct that is most appropriate; it is his or her svadharma, which might also vary given the specific context of his/her situation at any given time.

Mahābhārata says:

The same act is dharma or adharma for different people, depending on ‘time’, ‘place’, and ‘the person concerned’.



Over time, however, dharma became increasingly identified with Vedic rituals and traditional duties that were incumbent upon the social order – both as a member of his specific Varna, and as a person in a particular stage of life. This is referred to as the concept of varna-āsharma-dharma, which finds full expression in Manusmriti and broadly the entire Dharmashastra literature. The Vedas and dharmashāstras also somehow came to be identified as the only legitimate sources of dharma.

In this usage, dharma refers to the particular duties of each of the four principal Varna: Brahmin (priests); Kshatriya (warriors and rulers); Vaisyas (farmers and merchants); and Sudra (servants or those doing menial jobs).

It ordained an internally differentiated set of rules that maintained order within the society. This, however, resulted in dharma becoming enmeshed in a social hierarchy premised on inequality even as the ancient Indian way of life came to be identified with a defence of a social order based on varna-āsharma-dharma. Although The Mahābhārata does not explicitly engage with Varna in the sense that it does not delve deep into the question of inequality engendered by caste, it rejects the chief premise of the dharmashāstras, where birth had remained the sole basis of Varna

The Mahābhārata showed that by ‘producing arrogance in the upper castes and resentment in the lower castes, it had turned varna-dharma into the adharma of varna’. This was partly due to a fundamental error of conflating Varna – the division of callings with its corresponding universal professional ethics with the notion of jati-dharma (caste) that became something characteristically Indian and has continued to dominate Indian life and social relationships till date.



The aim of dharma, in other words, is to create and sustain individual and social conditions where each individual, in his or her own being, and in relationship with others, is able to explore the potential of his or her life and bring it to fruition in such ways that he or she can. Since conflict cannot altogether be eliminated from the human life, dharma foregrounds ‘the interrelatedness of all human life, and in the interdependence of all social living’.

However, how is this all relevant to our agenda at hand? The above discussion provides a basis for understanding the intricacies of Dharma. Many interpretations of Dharma, as mentioned before, ‘go beyond the human’: i.e. the Posthuman. This discussion is essential to direct you to a further reading: ‘Gandhi and the Posthumanist Agenda: An Early Expression of Global IR’ by Purushottama Bilimoria (in Indian IR Meets Global IR article series edited by Deepshikha Shahi and Raghav Dua): <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/17/gandhi-and-the-posthumanist-agenda-an-early-expression-of-global-ir/>

This article delves into how Mahatma Gandhi employed the concept of Dharma in his Posthuman ethics and practice. If you are curious to learn more about this, you are welcome to check out other articles in the Indian IR Meets Global IR series which cover Buddhist and Sikh perspectives as well. In addition to this, you must also check out the following articles in the Buddhism and International Relations article series edited by Raghav Dua:



- The Half-Truth of Western Political Realism: A Buddhist Critique by William J. Long:

<https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/31/the-half-truth-of-western-political-realism-a-buddhist-critique/>

- Buddhists Do Not Want Space Junk to Fall on Your Head by Daniel Capper:

<https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/31/buddhists-do-not-want-space-junk-to-fall-on-your-head/>

Second-half of the first article (by William J. Long) discusses various aspects of Buddhist political ethics and the second article discusses the environmental aspects of Space travel from a Buddhist perspective. Both are rooted in the Buddhist understanding of the concept of Dharma. In addition this, you may also refer to an interesting chapter on ‘Buddhism and Animal Rights’ by Paul Waldau in The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics:

- <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-oxford-handbook-of-buddhist-ethics-9780198746140>

(please mail the executive board if you require a PDF of this chapter).



Pachamama

Pachamama is an Inca word that translates to ‘Mother Earth’ or ‘Mother World’ in English.. It suggests a lifestyle in harmony with nature. Pachamama echoes the famous words: “The Earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the Earth befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth. This we know. We did not weave the web of life, We are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves.”

It is a concept deeply rooted in the beliefs and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Andes region in South America, particularly among the Quechua and Aymara communities. Pachamama represents more than just a deity; it embodies a profound reverence for the Earth and the natural world.

In the Andean cosmology, Pachamama is seen as a nurturing and life-giving force, responsible for the fertility of the land, the well-being of all living beings, and the balance of the ecosystem. She is often depicted as a mother figure, symbolizing care, abundance, and interconnectedness. The concept of Pachamama is central to indigenous rituals, ceremonies, and everyday life. Offerings and rituals are conducted to honour and give thanks to Pachamama for her blessings and to seek her protection and guidance. These ceremonies often involve offerings of food, coca leaves, and other symbolic items, all with the intention of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

In recent years, the concept of Pachamama has gained recognition and relevance beyond the Andean region, as it aligns with broader global movements advocating for environmental sustainability and respect for the Earth.



In recent years, the recognition of Pachamama has expanded beyond indigenous communities. In 2008, Ecuador became the first country to include the Rights of Nature, inspired by the concept of Pachamama, in its constitution. This groundbreaking development marked a significant step toward acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature and its protection as a legal right. Furthermore, Pachamama's message has reverberated globally, with people from diverse backgrounds embracing her teachings as a source of inspiration for environmental activism, sustainable living, and cultural preservation.

The concept encourages us to rethink our relationship with the Earth, emphasizing the importance of responsible stewardship and the long-term well-being of the planet. In the face of contemporary environmental challenges, Pachamama serves as a reminder that we are all custodians of the Earth. Climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss threaten the delicate balance that Pachamama represents.

Indigenous communities have long understood the importance of sustainable practices, and their wisdom can guide us toward more responsible and harmonious ways of living on this planet. Pachamama's teachings also challenge the prevailing Western worldview of human domination over nature.

In many indigenous cultures, humans are seen as an integral part of the natural world, not as separate entities with dominion over it. This perspective calls for a shift in our thinking, one that acknowledges our responsibility to protect and nurture the Earth rather than exploit it. Moreover, the concept of Pachamama emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and the preservation of indigenous traditions.



It underscores the value of respecting and learning from diverse worldviews, recognizing that each culture holds unique insights into sustainable living and the coexistence of humanity and the environment.

In conclusion, Pachamama is not just a belief but a profound way of life for the indigenous peoples of the Andes. It represents a holistic and interconnected worldview that reveres the Earth as a living being and a source of life. This concept holds relevance not only for indigenous communities but for the entire world, offering valuable lessons on sustainability, cultural preservation, and responsible stewardship of our planet. Embracing Pachamama's wisdom can guide us toward a more harmonious and equitable future for all living beings.

For further reading on this subject, please refer to the following:

- Pachamama: Our Earth, Our Future (United Nations Environment Programme Peace Child International):
<https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/29693>
- General Assembly Proclaims 22 April 'International Mother Earth Day' Adopting By Consensus Bolivia-Led Resolution (United Nations): <https://press.un.org/en/2009/ga10823.doc.htm>
- Chronology, UN Harmony with Nature:
<http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/chronology/>
- Non-Western Epistemology and the Understanding of the Pachamama (Environment) Within the World(s) of the Aymara Identity by Yaneth Katia Apaza Huanca:
<https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view/1241>



Research Questions

- 1) How can Indigenous Knowledge Systems be effectively integrated into mainstream sustainable development practices, and what are the key challenges in doing so?
- 2) What specific examples exist where indigenous practices have led to successful environmental conservation and sustainable resource management, and how can these be scaled up or adapted for broader use?
- 3) What role can posthumanist approaches play in reshaping policies and strategies for sustainable development, and how do they challenge or complement existing anthropocentric models?
- 4) How can the principles of Posthumanism be practically applied to promote ethical and sustainable relationships between humans, the environment, and non-human entities, such as animals and ecosystems?
- 5) What are the best practices for respecting and protecting the intellectual property rights of indigenous knowledge holders when integrating their insights into sustainable development initiatives?
- 6) What mechanisms can be established at national and international levels to ensure the meaningful participation of indigenous communities in decision-making processes related to sustainable development projects?
- 7) What is the role of education and awareness-building in promoting the integration of indigenous knowledge and posthumanist perspectives, and how can these be incorporated into formal education systems?



8) What are the potential economic and social benefits of incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and posthumanist values into sustainable development efforts, and how can these benefits be quantified and realized?

9) What case studies exist that demonstrate successful policy implementation that incorporates both indigenous knowledge and posthumanist principles, and what lessons can be drawn from these experiences?

10) How can the international community support and facilitate the exchange of indigenous knowledge and posthumanist practices among nations to enhance global sustainability efforts?



The 7th RCEP Ministerial Meeting
8 September 2019, Bangkok, Thailand



THE DECENNIAL EDITION
