

The Modern and Useful Explanation of ‘Krishi-Gaurakshya-Vanijyam Vaishya-karma Svabhavajam’

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Abstract

Indian Knowledge System is an inclusive concept. The correspondent between Knowledge and Conduct is its fundamental concept. Indian culture is flexible in its nature from its beginning to establish social harmony and order. The result of this flexibility is that Indian value system redefines and re-interpretate its own principles according to time and space. In 18th chapter of Bhagwad Geeta, Lord Krishna says Arjuna about Four Varna and their Kartavya. In this, He describes the swabhav based karma of Vaishya Varna, which is traditionally Krishi, Gau Rakshya and Vanijya. In present time, it's necessary to re – interpretate these Krishi, Gaurakshya and Vanijya terms based on sustainability. This method of reinterpretation will lead a new order to make relevance of social value system.

Key Words- Varna system, Sustainable Agriculture, Socio-Economic Ethics, Skill-Based Social Function (Svabhāva)

Introduction

The varnas system is very important in Vedic culture or Hinduism. While on one hand it is related to various activities of human society, on the other hand it is also related to the appropriate lifestyle of an individual's previous life stages. Essentially, the varnas system is a social duty-based system. The first description of the varnas is given in Rigveda's Purusha Sukta (10-90).

*Brāhmaṇo'sya mukhāmāsīdbāhū rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ |
Ūrū tadasya yadvaiśyaḥ padbhyāṃ sūdro ajāyata ||*

According to this hymn, Brahmins represents the mouth of the universal form of the Purusha, Kshatriyas represents his chest, Vaishyas represents his thighs, and Shudras represents his feet. In due course of time, the duties of these four varnas were also determined. This shows that all parts are equally important for the Purn Purusha. Here representation means symbolic. Just as for a perfect body, all its organs and parts need to be well organized only then a person can work to his full potential, in the same way, all the people of the society should work together

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to achieve its inherent goals. Here there is an excellent form of complete male society in which all the varnas have been determined as its parts.

In Chapter 18 of the Bhagavad Gita, descriptions of the Swabhavik Karma related to the four varnas are given:

śhamo damas tapaḥ śhauchaṁ kṣhāntir ārjavam eva cha
jñānaṁ vijñānaṁ āstikyaṁ brahma-karma svabhāva-jam¹

Abstemiousness, self-control, tenacity, purity, patient, integrity, knowledge, wisdom, and religiousness—these are the Swabhavik Karma of the Brahmins.

śauryaṁ tejo dhṛtirdākṣyaṁ yuddhe cāpyapalāyanam
dānamīśvarabhāvaśca kṣātraṁ karma svabhāvajam²

Valor, strength, fortitude, dexterity and also not fleeing from battle, generosity, leadership qualities these are the Swabhavik Karma of Kshatriyas born of their own nature.

‘Kṛīṣhi’gaurakṣyavāñijyaṁ vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam
paricaryātmakam karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajam³

Agriculture, cattle-rearing, and trade are the Swabhavik Karma of the Vaishya born of their own nature and service is the Swabhavik Karma of the Shudra also born of their own nature.

It is noteworthy that here it is necessary to define natural action. The varna system was created based on Guna and karma. Here, natural action is determined by guna only. This natural action is inspired by self-motivation only. The inspiration for this natural action is neither any kind of desire for success nor any kind of pressure, rather it is inspired only by the sense of duty. This natural action has been talked about in the Bhagavad Gita in the context of the four varnas.

In this way, the Bhagavad Gita clearly describes the qualities and actions of the four varnas in the Indian system. Before discussing the actions of the Vaishya varnas, which is the purpose of this research paper. it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the actions of the Shudra varnas. It is noteworthy that generally the actions of the Shudra varnas were limited to serving the other varnas. It is considered that the duty of the Shudra is to serve the other varnas. In this regard, it has been recently established that the use of the word "api" in the verse "paricaryātmakam karma shudrasyapi svabhāvajam" implies that the duty of service is not only for the Shudra varna, but also equally for other varnas as well.⁴ In this way, we can see that the duties of each of the four varnas were determined according to their natural abilities, and the classification of varnas was not done to indicate colour-based discrimination, but rather to indicate various duties for individuals with different abilities in society. One of the most important points is that in varna system no one is higher and lower. It is considered that every varna is equal and categorized on the basic of nature and performance. Thus, every varna is equally respected. Regarding this about Vaishya verna Vivekananda says, “The Vaishya varna represents the productive class of society, who create wealth through their work and trade. They are responsible for the economic well-being of the community, and their contribution to society

is essential. Their work is honorable and they must be respected for their skills and expertise in their respective fields.”⁵

This is the same vein as the service work that the Shudra performs is related to the current economic systems tertiary sector, meaning the service sector. The tertiary sector, which is the service sector, is an important indicator of the development pace of any country’s economic system.

Research Objectives

1. To reinterpret the Gītā’s verse (18.44) ‘Krishi-Gaurakṣya-Vāṇijyaṁ Vaiśya-Karma Svabhāvajam’ within the framework of modern economic, ecological, and ethical thought rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).
2. To explore the philosophical meaning of svabhāva and karma in the context of Vaiśya duties, analyzing their relevance for social sustainability.
3. To assess the contemporary significance of the three key occupations Krishi, Gaurakṣya, and Vāṇijya for rural development, environmental stewardship, and ethical entrepreneurship.
4. To provide a dharmic economic model that integrates traditional values with present-day needs for sustainable earth.
5. To offer educational insights for revitalizing Indian society by drawing from Vaiśya-dharma in a non-casteist, but svabhāva-based understanding.

Research Questions

1. What is the original philosophical meaning of the phrase ‘Krishi-Gaurakṣya-Vāṇijyaṁ Vaiśya-Karma Svabhāvajam’ in the Bhagavad Gita, and how was it traditionally understood?
2. How can the concept of svabhāvajam karma be applied to contemporary ethics and skill-based economic development?
3. Can a reinterpretation of Vaisya duties help in formulating a sustainable and ethical alternative to modern capitalist economic models?

Literature Review

Classical Interpretations of Vaiśya-Dharma

In the classical exegesis of Vaiśya-dharma by Śāṅkarācārya, Madhvācārya, and Abhinavagupta, occupational duties are placed within a larger metaphysical and ethical framework of svabhava and dharma. Śāṅkara’s exposition of varna-based duties is particularly significant in that it views duties organically linked to psychological and guṇa-based predispositions; in such a view, Vaiśya duties such as agriculture, trade, and cattle-rearing are not merely economic activities but have a strong ethical dimension in terms of lokasaṅgraha and the maintenance of cosmic order or ṛta. Such a view of Vaiśya duties and their place within a larger social order underscores the integrative function of economic activities within a

hierarchical social theory; however, it also implies a static relationship between predisposition and duty that does not easily accommodate historical change or social fluidity.

Dharma sastra and Arthashastra Traditions

In Manusmṛti and Yājñavalkya Smṛti, Vaiśyas are assigned roles in agriculture, cattle rearing, trade, and lending—all essential for material welfare and social stability. Kauṭilya's Arthashastra provides a pragmatic model of governance in which the Vaisya's contribution to the economy is seen as crucial to the kingdom's prosperity. Here, trade and agrarian production were carefully regulated to maintain fairness, prevent exploitation, and ensure surplus for redistribution.

Colonial and Postcolonial Reinterpretations

In the colonial era, scholars such as Max Mueller and Monier-Williams translated and altered varna-related texts through a racial or hierarchical prism. On the other hand, thinkers such as Swami Vivekananda highlighted the functional and spiritual significance of each varna without reference to birth. Mahatma Gandhi also advocated for the revival of cow protection (gauraksha) and khadi-based trade as means of achieving swaraj or self-governance, revealing a high degree of identification with Vaisya values.

The Bhagavad Gita describes the duties of the Vaishya class as agriculture, cow protection, and trade, which are natural activities for them. Similarly, the Agni Purana also states that 'Krishigorakshya Vanijyam Vaishyash parikirtitim'⁶ means Agriculture, Cow protection and trade are the duties of the Vaishya. The question arises as to how the Vaishya can be defined. Since the varnas system provides for the definition of all four varnas based on their qualities and actions, the Vaishya can also be defined based on their qualities. In this context, the Bhagavad Gita clearly states, "Chaturvarnasm maya srstam guna-karma-vibhagasah," meaning that the four varnas were created based on their qualities and actions. However, from a linguistic perspective, if we consider the word "Vaishya," it is derived from the Vedic root "vish," which means to dwell. The Vaishya word is also related to the word "praja," which means offspring. In ancient times, the society was referred to as "Vish" and its main protector was called "Vishpati." The word "Vish" is also related to the name Vishnu, who is the controller of creation and fulfills all our needs. Similarly, the Vaishya community also provides opportunities for vanijya and employment in society.

The Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapurana describes the characteristics of a Vaishya as follows:

Devgurvuchute Bhaktirtrivargpariposhanam,

Astikyamudyamo nityam naipunyam Vaishya lakshanam.⁷

"Devotion to the gods, respect for the guru, and nourishment of the three aims of life (dharma, artha, and kama). Constant effort in the pursuit of one's occupation, and proficiency in generating wealth - these are the signs of a Vaishya."

Similarly, the Manusmṛiti also outlines the various traits of a Vaishya:

Sarasaram ch bhandanam deshnam ch gunagunan,

Labhalabhm ch panyanam pashunam parivardhnam.⁸

"Their duties consist of knowledge of different commodities, both good and bad; of the profit and loss on merchandise; of the means of increasing the profits of their own business; and of the art of cultivating friendship with men of all varnas and countries." Similarly, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay says about Vaishya, 'The Vaishyas are an indispensable part of the Hindu society, without whom the society cannot function properly. They are the backbone of the nation, the guardians of its prosperity and the pillars of its strength. They are the farmers, the traders, and the artisans, the creators and preservers of wealth, the cultivators of the land and the makers of goods. They are the embodiment of the spirit of enterprise and the pioneers of progress. Without their contribution, the nation would be impoverished and weak, and its cultural heritage would be lost.'⁹ Swami Vivekananda was a great admirer of swabhava based varna system. He always points out that it is a magnificent tool of social harmony and human progress. In this reference, describing about the nature of Vaishya he says, "The Vaishyas are the mediators between the higher and lower castes, and play an important role in maintaining social harmony. They are the backbone of the rural economy, and their skills in agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade are essential to the well-being of the community. Their contribution to society is immeasurable, and we must recognize their importance and honour them accordingly."¹⁰ The role of Vaishya varna is how much important, it reflects in J.N. Farquhar's writings, "The Vaishya varna, as the third varna, occupies a vital place in the Hindu social order, as it links the higher varnas with the lower ones. The Vaishyas are responsible for the economic well-being of the community, and their work is essential for the smooth functioning of society. They are the mediators between the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas on one hand, and the Shudras on the other, and their role in maintaining social harmony cannot be overstated."¹¹

Research Gap - Existing scholarship on Vaiśya-dharma has largely been limited to textual interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita and Dharmaśāstra literature, or to idealized models of varṇāśrama-dharma, with little attention to how these prescriptions functioned in actual socio-economic contexts. There is also a lack of critical engagement with the material dimensions of Vaiśya roles, particularly in relation to power, inequality, and changing market systems. Moreover, the relationship between Dharmaśāstra and Arthaśāstra traditions remains insufficiently explored, especially regarding how ethical and economic frameworks intersect. Additionally, although colonial and postcolonial reinterpretations have reshaped understandings of varṇa, there is limited integrated analysis connecting these shifts to earlier textual traditions and historical realities. The evolving semantic and functional dimensions of the Vaiśya category thus remain under-theorized.

This study addresses these gaps through an integrative approach combining philological, historical, and socio-economic analysis. By examining the interplay between prescription and practice across classical and modern contexts, it reconceptualizes Vaiśya-dharma as a dynamic and historically situated concept, offering fresh insights into the relationship between ethics, economy, and social organization.

Krishi (Agriculture): Agriculture is a word of Latin origin that is formed by combining two words, Agric and Cultura. Agric refers to the soil, while Cultura refers to cultivation.

Agriculture = Agric (soil) + Cultura (cultivation). In literal terms, Agriculture means the cultivation of the soil. Agriculture is also referred to as an art, a science, and a vanijya, as it combines all of these aspects.

The origin of civilization gradually advances in a sequence. Humans progressively develop their civilization and culture throughout their lives. In ancient times, humans sustained their lives by consuming fruits and flowers. Later, when humans started consuming meat, their way of living changed. With the refinement of culture, humans continued to sustain their lives through means such as animal husbandry. As time passed and the population increased, it became impossible to sustain the production of fruits, flowers, milk, and meat, so civilization entered another era - the era of agriculture. Generally, human life is dependent on other living beings. Without food, there are no strength, intelligence, or morals. If food is not fulfilled, even a religious person becomes animalistic. In the Vedic system, the word 'Arya' originally means farmer or offspring of farmers. Generally, the term Arya refers to individuals who are distinguished by their excellent qualities in behaviour and thought. This word 'ri' is derived from a root word in Sanskrit called 'ar'. This root word has a meaning related to movement or motion. Similarly, in other languages, there is a root word with a similar meaning related to agriculture. In Greek, it is 'aratv', in Latin, it is 'arvo', in Gothic, it is 'argan', in Lithuanian. However, in Sanskrit, there is no root word 'ar'. Some scholars believe that it is possible that the root word 'ri' is a transformation of the root word 'ar' and that its original meaning is 'to plow or till the land'. It is also possible that the root word 'ri' acquired its meaning related to movement or motion due to the motion of the plow. The word 'arya' in Sanskrit also has another meaning, which is 'a Vaishya'.¹² This is evident from a sutra in the third chapter of Panini's Ashtadhyayi, which says "arya means a Vaishya and his own people". In addition, in the Siddhantakaumudi commentary on the sutra 'Indra Varun – Bhav Sharv' ¹³(4-1-49).

The word "Kisan" has its roots in the Sanskrit word "Krish dhatu". The meaning of "Krish" is to pull, tear, plow, cultivate, etc. This "Krish" is also present in words like "Karshan" and "Akarshan" which mean attraction, and it is because of this attraction that Lord Krishna is called "Krishna". Many other words have been derived from "Krish", including "Krishak", which means a cultivator or a farmer. "Krishak" is synonymous with "Halwaha" and "Halki Phal". The word "Kisan" directly comes from the Prakrit word "Krishan" which was later transformed into "Kisan" in Hindi. "Krishak", "Krishikarmi", and "Krishi-bal" are other names for a farmer. Agriculture is directly related to human life, and it is through agriculture that we obtain food. According to the Atharvaveda, food is the foundation of life for all living beings. Without it, no living creature can survive.

Jivanti svadhayannen martyah. ¹⁴

Even poets and scholars used to do agriculture. Human life was dependent on agriculture and food. Those who were skilled in the knowledge of agriculture were called Krishitaradhi and Upajivaniya (successful livelihood). The word "Krishi" is derived from the verb "Karshan" which not only means pulling or tearing but also implies attraction or traction. Therefore, agriculture includes not only material objects but also subtle thoughts and ideas that are connected to the mind and intelligence. Krishi derived from kri dhatu in Sanskrit which means creativity and 'shi' as in rishi for reaching the highest level. Krishi is the process to be creative

and reach at the top level. Hence, a wide range of activities such as computer science, biotechnology, music, and business fall under agriculture. Thus, not only farmers but also every person in the world is a farmer in their respective fields. A research paper cited in International Journal of Hindu Studies says about Krishi, “The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes the importance of agriculture as a source of sustenance for all living beings and encourages the practice of farming with a spirit of detachment and dedication.”¹⁵ J. Krishna Murti also says, “The Bhagavad Gita offers a holistic perspective on agriculture as a means of sustenance and spiritual practice. It emphasizes the importance of working in harmony with nature and cultivating a sense of detachment and equanimity towards the fruits of one's labour.”¹⁶

Knowledge from Rigveda and Atharvaveda tells us that King Prithu, son of King Vena, was the first discoverer of agriculture. They were the ones who first discovered the secrets of producing various types of food through agriculture. According to Atharvaveda, in the lineage of Vaivasvat Manu, the son of Vena became King Prithu, who practiced agriculture and produced food.

The life of all human beings depends on agriculture and food, which is why everyone sought the shelter of agricultural knowledge. The knowledgeable and wise ones mentioned in the Atharvaveda's agricultural hymns cultivate and produce food.

Te krishim ch sasyam ch manushya upjivanti,

Krishtradhiroop Jeewaniyo bhavati.¹⁷

"The farmers and crops produce food and sustain the lives of human beings. Life becomes nourished like the crop that grows with care."

Agriculture is considered an extremely important activity. It is evident from the specific features of agriculture that whatever activity a person is capable of in their daily life and whatever they produce through that ability is called agriculture. Even today, in Indian rural society, it is commonly believed that the person engaged in any work is doing agriculture for the efficient execution of that work. For example, a student's cultivation is their studying, and a teacher's cultivation is their quality teaching. Thus, we can see that every aspect of life is agriculture. Just as a farmer's success is determined by the advanced crops produced through farming, similarly, a person's proficiency in any work is their agriculture. Here, agriculture means creativity. Thus, the characteristic of a vaishya, which is to do agricultural work, reflects that any new research work, the use of new technologies, and the new methods for operating life smoothly are all part of the merchant's characteristics, and they all come into play in the agriculture system. Vaishya is the backbone of Indian traditional agriculture system. Referring this V. S. Naipaul says, “The Vaishya varna embodies the values of hard work, thrift, and enterprise, which are essential for the progress and prosperity of any society. Through their work and trade, the Vaishyas have contributed to the economic development of India for centuries. They have played a vital role in the growth of commerce, industry, and agriculture, and have been instrumental in creating wealth and generating employment.”¹⁸

Gau - The general meaning of the word "Gau" is the cow in Indian villages. From Vedic Sanskrit to cultural development to this day, the cow has remained the foundation of Indian

culture. In the common language of Indian tradition, Gau, Ganga, Geeta, and Gayatri are the protectors of this culture. The importance of cows has been so great that in the Vedas, it is said that cows should not be killed. One can estimate how important cows are in the Indian cultural system from this fact. In the Mahabharata, while describing the cow, Guru Maharishi Vashishtha, the guru of Lord Shri Rama and King Saudas of the Ikshvaku dynasty, states in the Gavopaniṣad:

“Ghee and milk-giving cows, cows that are the source of ghee, cows that reveal ghee, cows that are like ghee-rivers, and cows that are like ghee tornadoes, may they always reside in my home. May ghee resides in my heart always and be established in my navel...”¹⁹

Rigveda emphasis, “In other words, the name of the cow is synonymous with the earth, as it spreads far and wide, and infinite living beings travel on it.”²⁰ This also reflects that cow protection is the protection of whole nature.

In the Nighantu, there are many words for the term "Earth." Yaśhakāchārya has explained that the Earth is also called "gāy," which means "cow" in Sanskrit. Our life is sustained by the Earth, and the cow is also a helper in this regard. Therefore, the Earth is also called a cow. The cow is also a symbol of movement because it is believed that cows roam freely. With the help of cows, humans move and make efforts, and thus, the life force of humans is symbolized by the cow. This explanation makes it clear that the term "cow" represents an element that provides movement in life. Aditya, the sun, is also called "gau" because it is the ultimate source of inspiration and is also a companion. All the zodiac signs of the Sun are also called "gāv," as in the mantra: “Stay in the house where the rays of the sun spread completely, like cows in a large shed.”²¹

The term "cow" represents not only the cow but also the entire Earth and the life force that moves it. British scientist James Lovelock presented the Gaia Hypothesis in his research paper "Gaia as Seen through the Atmosphere" in 1972. Its name was based on the name of the mythical Greek goddess Gaia, who represents the Earth. According to this hypothesis, the Earth is a complex living unit that maintains a balance between organisms and their physical environment through self-regulation. It is noteworthy that in rural Indian environments, the cow is called "Gaia," and as described above, cows are considered representations of the Earth in the Vedas. In India, since ancient times, the Earth has been considered a living unit, and discussions about its conservation and sustainable development have been ongoing. Vaishya has also talked about protecting life, which includes the protection of the cow and the Earth, and maintaining the dynamic equilibrium of the Earth's resources. The use of new technologies and research should be made in such a way that the environment remains sustainable, and life remains a source of dynamic energy, promoting social, economic, moral, and spiritual development. The Vaishya class is responsible for the conservation and regulation of all these aspects. Cow protection and service have been ingrained in the Indian psyche since ancient times. Even the modern Indian artist and leader Mahatma Gandhi was vocal about the conservation of cows. He believed that India should not succumb to Western influence and should chart its development path based on its cultural heritage and values. He believed that the country needed development based on rural areas. Gandhi understood the importance of cows in a country like India in this system. According to Gandhi, the meaning of cow protection

is the protection of all mute creations of God. This statement by Gandhi also reflects the need for the conservation of the entire planet. In 1921, in the Young India magazine, he wrote, "The cow is the form of compassion. It is like a mother to millions of Indians. Cow protection means the protection of all the creatures that are the weakest and most helpless in the world..."²² Swami Vivekanand also says the similar sentence, "The Bhagavad Gita teaches us the importance of ahimsa (non-violence) and the sacredness of all life, including that of cows. Cow protection is not just a religious duty, but a moral imperative for living a compassionate and just life."²³

According to Mahatma Gandhi, cows are also quite important for economic development in rural areas. Even if it is not profitable from an economic perspective, Gandhi criticized the tradition of killing animals that were developed in the West. In the Harijan newspaper, he wrote, "As far as the pure economic necessity of cow protection is concerned, if it is thought of only from this perspective, then the solution is easy. Then all those animals should be killed without any consideration, whose milk has dried up or whose cost of upkeep is less than the price of the milk they provide, or whose have become old and useless. However, there is no place in India for this heartless approach, although the residents of this land are guilty of many heartless acts due to the appearance of opposition."²⁴ The Indian Constitution includes provisions for the protection of cows under Article 48, which directs the state to take steps for preserving and improving the breeds of cows and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves. Government of India is also very actively making laws to protect and preserve cows. The Indian government has launched several initiatives to support cow protection, such as the Rashtriya Gokul Mission, which aims to develop and conserve indigenous cow breeds, and the Kamdhenu Yojana, which provides financial assistance to farmers for the protection and care of cows.

In Indian tradition, cows have been given significant importance since the Vedic age. Both cows and the earth are closely related to each other. They are both mutual helpers and companions. The earth is the foundation of the world of the dead, and the cow is considered the foundation of the world of the gods. In the Vedas, the word "mahī" meaning forgiving is used for both cows and the earth. In the scriptures, the cow is called Sarvadevamayi, meaning the mother of all gods. The Atharva Veda, Upanishads, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas, and Smritis are all filled with the glory of cows. Cows are called Surabhi, Kamadhenu, Yajnapadi, Kalyani, Bahula, Kamadhuk, the life of the universe, and the mother of Rudra, among other names. The Shruti state, "Ma gāmanāgāmaditiṃ vadhiṣṭ"²⁵ meaning cows are innocent, faultless, and not deserving of pain.

Currently, the trend of hugging cows and keeping them for some time by putting their arms around them is increasing in many countries around the world. It is called cow hug therapy. According to a report by CNBC, it is quite popular in America, and people are spending up to \$200 per hour on it. The increased negativity among people after the coronavirus pandemic has given a further boost to this cow hug therapy. According to reports, people remain in a peaceful state for some time by putting their arms around the cow, which makes them feel positive and calm.

It becomes clear that the natural duty of a Vaishya is to protect not only cows but also the entire earth and environment. Brahma is considered the creator, Shiva the destroyer, and Vishnu the

preserver or protector. According to the Padma Purana, when Hiranyaksha drowned the earth in the ocean, Lord Vishnu lifted the earth from the ocean in his Varaha avatar. This incident also establishes that the responsibility of cow protection falls on Vishnu, the caretaker, who has a natural inclination towards it as a Vaishya. This should remain highlighted in their practical actions. From a practical perspective, even modern society adorns members of the Vaishya varnas with certain titles that create the impression that they have achieved a high social status based on their actions. Traditional members of the Vaishya varnas have been addressed as Mahajan, Seth, or Sahoo. The use of the word Mahajan suggests that such people have great importance in society. This greatness is seen in the behaviour of traditional Vaishya or Bania community members, especially in rural areas. If we look at their lifestyle and diet, we can estimate their natural way of life. Their clothes are usually very simple. Most of their food is vegetarian and plain. It can also be said that their behaviour may be due to stinginess, but their social service cannot be denied because they are involved in religious activities, such as building Dharamshala. Their conduct suggests that they have been called "Mahajan" because they stay away from luxury and extravagance even after achieving financial prosperity. This sentiment is often addressed and expressed with different words for the merchant class, such as the use of the word "Seth," which is sometimes used together with "Mahajan," as in "seth-mahajan." If we look at their lifestyle and diet, we can estimate their natural way of living. Their clothes are quite simple. The food they eat is mostly vegetarian and plain. It could also be said that their behaviour may be due to their miserliness, but their social service cannot be denied because they are actively involved in religious work, such as building dharmshalas. From their conduct, it appears that they have been called "Mahajan" due to their avoidance of indulgence even after economic prosperity. The words used for addressing the Vaishya community reflect this sentiment. The word "Seth" comes from the fact that they are associated with the best behaviour of the Vaishya community. And the origin of the word "sahu" seems to come from the word "sadhu", which makes it clear what contribution the decorated paths like the best or Mahajan have. The sadhu is only for the welfare of the people and is a guide for society. The word Sadhu come from the root *sādh*, which means "reach one's goal", "make straight", or "gain power over".²⁶ The same root is used in the word sadhana, which means "spiritual practice". It literally means one who practises a "sadhana" or a path of spiritual discipline.²⁷ Vaishya varna which is named Sahu, their behaviour and thoughts are expressed only through his sadhu sentiment and are useful in efficiently running society. Based on these qualities, whoever guides society will ensure its security. Vanijya is an essential element of society's governance.

Vanijya - Generally, the term 'vanijya' is used in the sense of commercial activity. It mainly includes two types of activities. The first is the sale or exchange of goods, which is called business. The second is various services that assist in the business. This includes banking, insurance, telecommunications, advertising, packaging, etc. In a general sense, vanijya works as the necessary link between producers and consumers. In this way, vanijya is the activity that removes obstacles in exchange or transfer. Various types of activities have been established for the balanced development of human life since Vedic times. Over time, the four goals of life - dharma, artha, kama, and moksha - were described as the objectives of life. In this, economic activity was linked to religion to promote it further. A man should earn money through religious

principles and should never engage in corruption because its consequences are terrible. Corruption, misconduct, etc. are not mentioned in Vedic economics and legal systems. With the increase in population and abundance of resources in different parts of the world, as well as an increase in production, various means of transportation and exchange were sought to bring these resources to people. This activity was called vanijya. In the context of India, references to commercial activities have been found since ancient times. Businessmen during the Buddhist era also studied the sea routes that had been in use since the Rig Veda, and they also circumambulated the shores of various elements. The rural Indian society during the Vedic era was economically self-sufficient. The village system was such that they did not feel the need for any other place to exchange goods. All rural centers were self-sufficient. The owner of each house would produce the necessary items for their household needs by growing crops in their fields, and the women of the household would provide clothing and other necessities. In addition, other artisans associated with the village would produce common items for consumption. Due to social complexity, this system could not continue indefinitely and growing needs led to dependence on other places for the purchase and sale of goods, and commercial activities began. Today's word 'baniya' is a derivative of the word 'vanik'.

In this way, we can see that vanijya is considered a natural occupation for the Vaishya varnas. Vanijya, or business, involves the principle of movement from one place to another. In addition to goods, if we attempt to explain this natural duty of the Vaishyas on a social basis, it can be said that the production and distribution of goods and services should be carried out in such a way that the mutual exchange of emotions remains harmonious. The Vaishya also must maintain this by editing the social aspects of the exchange of goods in society and maintaining a constant exchange of emotions towards each other. R. K. Narayan emphasizes the quality of Vaishya that "The Vaishya caste is known for their hard work, thriftiness, and business acumen. They are adept at trading, money lending, and other forms of commerce. They understand the value of money and are skilled at managing it. These qualities make them a vital component of the Indian economy."²⁸ Discussing the role of Vaishya in Indian society a famous writer and politician Shashi Tharoor says, "The Vaishya varna has always been associated with entrepreneurship and wealth creation, and its members are respected for their economic contributions. This has been true for centuries, as evidenced by the thriving merchant communities that existed in India long before the arrival of the British. The Vaishyas were instrumental in building India's wealth and prestige, and their work helped to lay the foundation for the country's economic success."²⁹ Describing the economic role of Vaishya A famous economist Amartya Sen says, "The Vaishyas are the backbone of the Indian economy, with their skills in trade and commerce. From ancient times, they have played a key role in the economic life of India, trading in goods and services, and creating wealth for themselves and for the nation. Their entrepreneurial spirit, and their willingness to take risks, have been the driving force behind many of India's economic successes."³⁰

Describing the Role of Vaishya as an ethical guide of society Radhakrishnan says, "The Bhagavad Gita offers a framework for ethical commerce based on the principles of dharma (duty), karma (action), and yoga (union). It emphasizes the importance of honest and fair dealings, and the pursuit of wealth to fulfil one's social responsibilities and spiritual aspirations."³¹ Similarly, famous Indian businessman Ratan Tata said in his board meeting

about business ethics, “The Bhagavad Gita teaches us about the principles of fair trade and ethical business practices. It emphasizes the importance of honest dealings and the pursuit of wealth to fulfil one's duties and responsibilities.”³² Generally, it is observed that when economic and physical activities remain balanced, the level of attitudes results in social harmony. Therefore, it is the duty of the Vaishya, under the guise of their commercial qualities, to cooperate in maintaining social balance.

Conclusion-

In re-examining the Vaiśyas' duties in ‘Kṛiṣhi’, Gaurakṣya, and Vāṇijya, this study extends the understanding of these duties beyond their conventional, occupation-based meanings into the realm of contemporary sustainability, economic, and social responsibility discourses. Thus, ‘Kṛiṣhi’ becomes re-imagined as sustainable agriculture, where ecological equilibrium meets food security; gaurakṣya evolves into ethical animal husbandry, including the preservation of biodiversity; while vāṇijya transforms into responsible, inclusive, and ethical entrepreneurship, where fairness, equity, and societal well-being come into play. In this re-imagined form, Vaiśya-dharma cannot be viewed as static or hereditary but as functional, ethical, skill-based, and aptitude-driven.

The analysis also indicates how the concept of svabhāva, which is an important aspect of varṇa, is now best interpreted as a principle of skill-based social function rather than as a principle of identity, and how this interpretation is consistent with contemporary values of dignity of labor, professional specialization, and socio-economic mobility, thus providing a link between classical thought and contemporary reality. More importantly, this reinterpretation is also a response to the contemporary global issues of ecological degradation, economic disparities, and ethical crises in the present form of the capitalist system of economics. It is also a proof of the fact that the traditional Indian concepts and ideas, when critically and contextually re-interpreted and re-evaluated, can also contribute to the development of sustainable development and socio-economic ethics. The emphasis on harmony between man and nature, between individual skills and social obligations, and between economics and ethics continues to be a guiding principle.

In conclusion, the present study is a proof of the fact that the Indian Knowledge System is not only a repository of the past but also a living and evolving knowledge system and tradition. The reinterpretation of the concept of “Kṛiṣhi–Gaurakṣya–Vāṇijyam” through the lens of sustainability and socio-economic ethics is a proof of the fact that the concept of Vaiśya-dharma is not only relevant to the present times but also provides a framework for the development of a socially and naturally harmonious society and social order.

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