

EXTREMES AND EXISTENCE
IDEALISM, MATERIALISM
CO-EXISTENTIALISM



DR. SUNIL CHHANWAL
DR. SURENDRA PATHAK

**Between Extremes and Existence:
Idealism, Materialism,
Co-Existentialism and
Its Impact on Humanity**

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Between Extremes and Existence: Idealism, Materialism, Co-Existentialism and Its Impact on Humanity

Dr. Sunil Chhanwal
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FOREWORD

The ancient tension and mutual opposition between idealism and materialism have failed to shape the direction of human thought, even though each perspective offers a distinct interpretation of reality. Idealism, in attempting to establish the essence of existence in mind and consciousness, became entangled in mystery—a mystery that materialism exploited—while materialism, in its effort to ground reality firmly in the physical world and explain natural laws, became trapped in dialectics and drifted into instability and uncertainty. For centuries, Eastern and Western philosophy has oscillated between these two poles: the idealist tradition emphasizes mystical consciousness, values, and transcendent realities, but essential human conduct, behavior, and systems remained trapped in mystery; while the materialist tradition grounds itself in the empirical observation of matter and socio-economic structures, yet fell victim to a consumerist socio-economic culture and system steeped in indulgence and over-consumption. Both these schools of thought have revealed significant limitations when adopted as the sole practical and humane perspective for understanding reality. Eastern philosophical traditions, although often presenting holistic alternatives, have themselves sometimes struggled to articulate systematic responses to questions raised by modern science, technology, and social organisation. It is against this backdrop that "From Extremes to Existence" emerges as a timely and significant contribution to contemporary philosophical discourse.

This book appears to attempt to situate A. Nagraj's Madhyasth Darshan—the philosophy of Co-Existence—within the broader landscape of human philosophical inquiry by placing it in sustained dialogue with idealism and materialism. This comparative approach addresses a fundamental challenge facing humanity in an age of deep fragmentation, where ancient wisdom traditions seem disconnected from modern scientific inquiry, environmental crises expose the limits of purely material thinking, and technological advancement often outpaces ethical reflection. This is the foremost problem of our times.

What makes this study particularly valuable is that while establishing Madhyasth Darshan as yet another philosophical alternative, it demonstrates how Co-Existentialism proposes to transcend the idealism-

materialism dualism by reconceptualising the fundamental nature of existence. The central claim of this book—that reality is confined neither to idealism nor to materialist physicalism, but is constituted by Co-Existence as a fundamental ontological fact—deserves serious philosophical attention. If consciousness and matter are both real and participate in a unified existence (Co-Existence) characterised by inherent relationality, then many complex problems left unanswered in previous philosophy are offered new, universal solutions.

The book's carefully structured approach reflects thoughtful pedagogical design. Part I establishes the historical and conceptual foundations, tracing idealism from Plato through German Idealism and exploring its Eastern expressions in Vedanta and Buddhism, while simultaneously following materialism's development from ancient atomists through Marxist dialectics. Part II presents the core architecture of Co-Existentialism: its ontology, epistemology, and axiology that grounds knowledge in direct realisation, and its comprehensive vision of human purpose encompassing resolution (*samadhan*), prosperity (*samriddhi*), fearlessness (*abhay*), and co-existence (*sah-astitva*). Moving beyond mere exposition, it demonstrates how this system addresses concrete questions about justice, education, governance, and ecological sustainability. Part III brings Madhyasth Darshan into conversation with contemporary systems thinking and ecological philosophy, suggesting that it may provide conceptual resources for addressing environmental degradation, social fragmentation, and the spiritual emptiness that accompanies materialism. As the analysis unfolds, Co-Existentialism emerges as a harmonious middle path, advocating for the symbiotic co-existence of opposing forces and recognising the complex interconnectedness of all existence. This philosophy presents a holistic understanding that acknowledges the intricate web of relationships binding individuals, nature, and the cosmos together.

Any philosophical system invites critical scrutiny, and readers will undoubtedly bring various perspectives to evaluating the claims presented here. Such critical engagement is not only welcome but essential for genuine philosophical dialogue. However, what cannot be questioned is the timeliness and importance of this book. As humanity confronts challenges that are simultaneously material and spiritual, individual and

collective, local and global, we require frameworks capable of holding these dimensions together without reduction or dismissal.

This book invites readers into a rich philosophical conversation—one that respects the depth of established traditions while remaining open to new syntheses. It will prove valuable to philosophers seeking fresh perspectives, practitioners seeking integrative frameworks, and thoughtful individuals who sense that our prevailing paradigms have not yet provided the comprehensive understanding necessary to navigate existence in the twenty-first century. Through this transformative journey that challenges extremes and celebrates the beauty of existence, we may discover pathways toward a more compassionate, inclusive, and sustainable world.

Professor Asha Shukla

Managing Director,

Asha Paras Peace & Harmony Foundation and

Former Vice Chancellor, Dr B.R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences

FOREWORD

In a world increasingly polarized by ideological extremes—where idealism often soars into abstract detachment and materialism plunges into mechanistic reductionism—"Between Extremes and Existence: Idealism, Materialism, Co-Existentialism and Its Impact on Humanity" emerges as a profound and timely intervention. Authored by Dr. Sunil Chhanwal and Dr. Surendra Pathak, this volume masterfully dissects the historical pendulum swing between these two dominant philosophical paradigms, revealing their contributions to human progress as well as their roles in fostering alienation, exploitation, and ecological peril.

Drawing on the rich tapestry of Western philosophical traditions—from Plato's eternal Forms to Marx's dialectical materialism—the authors expose the inherent limitations of dualistic thinking. Yet, they do not stop at critique. Instead, they introduce Co-Existentialism (Madhyasth Darshan or Sah-Astitvavād), the visionary framework propounded by Shri A. Nagraj, as a transcendent alternative. Here, existence is unveiled as an intrinsically harmonious co-existence: a self-regulated order where material units, vital beings, and conscious entities interrelate inseparably within all-pervading space. Consciousness and matter are not locked in opposition but serve as complementary expressions of a unified reality, accessible through direct experiential realization (anubhav-mūlak bodh).

What sets this book apart is its seamless integration of philosophical depth with practical wisdom. Structured across three illuminating parts, it first diagnoses the human costs of fragmentation, then expounds the core principles of Co-Existentialism—including its ontology of relatedness, epistemology of awakening, ethics of humane conduct, family-centric societal vision, and cyclical economics of sustainable prosperity—and finally engages in enriching dialogues with contemporary thought streams such as phenomenology, systems theory, and ecological philosophy. The result is not mere theory but a blueprint for transformation: cultivating individual resolution (samādhān), societal fearlessness (abhay), and collective harmony in an era beset by mental unrest, social division, inequality, and environmental crisis.

Dr. Chhanwal and Dr. Pathak, with their interdisciplinary expertise spanning psychology, philosophy, and spiritual inquiry, have crafted a work that bridges ancient Indian wisdom with modern global challenges. Rooted in Nagraj's Madhyasth Darshan, this book affirms humanity's unique capacity—and responsibility—to awaken to co-existence, thereby realizing a consciousness-based civilization free from the pitfalls of extremism.

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, this volume serves as an indispensable guide for scholars, educators, policymakers, and seekers alike. It invites us to move beyond conflict toward complementarity, from confusion to clarity, and from survival to flourishing. I commend the authors for this pathbreaking contribution and urge readers to engage with it not just intellectually, but existentially.

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PREFACE

This book delves into the enduring philosophical tension between Idealism and Materialism—two opposites that have profoundly influenced human thought and the trajectory of civilisation. Idealism places consciousness, spirit, and ideas at the core of reality, while Materialism maintains that only physical matter and its processes constitute true existence. Across millennia, humanity has swung between these extremes, yielding extraordinary advancements in spiritual depth, ethical frameworks, scientific discovery, and technological innovation—yet also engendering profound alienation, exploitation, psychological disarray, and ecological ruin.

Although each tradition harbours essential truths, their antagonistic dualism has confined us to a fragmented worldview that sustains conflict and division. The core thesis of this book is that true resolution emerges not from siding with one pole, nor from an artificial compromise, but from transcending the duality entirely via the paradigm of Co-Existentialism (Madhyasth Darshan or Sah-Astitvavād), systematically expounded by Shri A. Nagraj.

Co-Existentialism unveils existence as an intrinsically harmonious, self-regulating order in which every unit—whether material, vital, or conscious—coexists in indivisible relatedness, immersed in all-pervading space. Consciousness and matter are not rivals but interdependent facets of a singular reality. Humans, endowed with the unique capacity to awaken to this co-existence through direct experiential realisation (anubhav-mulak bodh), hold the privilege and duty to align personal conduct and societal systems with this innate harmony. Upon such awakening, universal values, righteous behaviour, sustainable prosperity, and mutual fulfilment arise organically—not as enforced doctrines, but as the natural manifestation of enlightened understanding.

Through rigorous critique of Western philosophical lineages, comparative engagement with Indian wisdom traditions, and constructive dialogues with modern streams of thought—including phenomenology, systems theory, and ecological philosophy—this volume illustrates how Co-

Existentialism furnishes a comprehensive integrative framework that overcomes the shortcomings of both Idealism and Materialism. It presents a robust ontology of coexistence, an epistemology anchored in direct realisation, an ethics of universal humane conduct, a societal vision centred on complementary family units, and an economic model of cyclical, need-fulfilling prosperity—all rooted in the lived recognition of existence as relational harmony.

Organised in three parts, the book begins by exposing the human and civilizational costs of dualistic thinking, proceeds to elucidate the foundational principles of Co-Existentialism, and concludes with comparative explorations alongside contemporary paradigms—from phenomenological insights into lived experience to ecological calls for interdependence. We intend to offer not mere intellectual speculation but actionable wisdom: a unified approach to knowledge, conduct, and systemic organisation that cultivates individual resolution (*samadhan*), familial and societal prosperity (*samruddhi*), fearlessness (*abhay*), and conscious coexistence (*sah-astitva*).

In a time rife with existential challenges—widespread mental distress, deepening social divides, rampant inequality, and planetary ecological crisis—the realisation of co-existence stands as a vital, transformative beacon for a humane, sustainable, and undivided human civilisation.

We extend this work as a heartfelt invitation to readers—academics, educators, students, practitioners, and truth-seekers—to deeply study, contemplate, and embody the understanding of co-existence. May it inspire and support the dawn of a consciousness-centred era founded on harmony, trust, and shared flourishing.

Dr Sunil Chhanwal

Dr Surendar Pathak

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The journey of writing this book has been enriched by the support, guidance, and encouragement of many individuals, to whom I owe profound gratitude.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest thanks to my co-author, Dr Surendra Pathak. It was his initial inspiration, selfless guidance, and unwavering motivation that encouraged me to embark on this endeavour. His generous investment of time and wisdom has been instrumental in bringing this work to fruition.

I am eternally grateful to my mother, Smt. Geetadevi Meena, for her boundless love, sacrifice, and constant support, and to the cherished memory of my late father, Shri Hargovind Meena, whose values continue to guide me.

A very special and heartfelt gratitude goes to my wife, Dr Heena S. Chhanwal. Her unwavering belief in me, patient encouragement, and steadfast partnership were indispensable throughout this journey. Without her, this book would not have seen the light of day. I also express my deep love and appreciation to our daughter, Dhvani, whose innocent joy and affectionate presence provided endless inspiration and strength during long hours of writing.

Finally, my profound reverence and gratitude to my Guruji, Shri A. Nagraj, the propounder of Madhyasth Darshan, whose profound wisdom forms the very foundation of this work. I am equally thankful to all my brothers and sisters in the Madhyasth Darshan family for their spiritual companionship, insightful discussions, and blessings that have imbued this book with deeper meaning and purpose.

To everyone who has contributed—directly or indirectly—to this effort, I offer my sincere and humble thanks.

Dr Sunil Chhanwal

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Part I: The Human Quest Between Extremes

Chapter 1: The Two Poles of Thought: Idealism and Materialism

1.1 Introduction

The history of Western philosophy can be understood as a prolonged conversation between two opposing worldviews: Idealism and Materialism. These are not merely abstract positions debated in university halls. There are ways of understanding what is real, what matters, and how we should live. Idealism claims that mind, spirit, or ideas form the foundation of reality. Materialism insists that only physical matter exists, and everything else—including consciousness—emerges from material processes. Between these two poles, human civilisation has swung like a pendulum. With each swing, real consequences have followed for how societies organise themselves and how individuals understand their place in the world (Tarnas, 1991).

Between these poles lies the entire spectrum of human civilisation — oscillating between spiritual abstraction and economic determinism, between the heavens of ideals and the ground of material survival. Both currents, at their extremes, have produced magnificent achievements and catastrophic consequences. The idealist has built cathedrals, universities, and moral codes — yet also justified hierarchies and divine right. The materialist has produced industry, technology, and revolutions — yet also alienation, exploitation, and ecological imbalance.

This chapter traces the development of both traditions, examines their core claims, and explores the human costs of maintaining such a rigid dualism. We will see that while each perspective offers important insights, the division between them has created deep problems in how we think about ourselves and relate to one another.

1.2 The Origin of Idealism:

1.2.1 Western Idealism: Plato's World of Forms

Western Idealism begins, in many ways, with Plato (427-347 BCE). For Plato, the physical world we experience through our senses is not truly real. It is merely a shadow, a poor copy of something more fundamental. The real world, according to Plato, is the realm of Forms or Ideas—eternal, perfect, unchanging patterns that exist beyond space and time (Plato, trans. 1997).

Consider Plato's famous allegory of the cave. Imagine prisoners chained in a dark cave, facing a wall. Behind them burns a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners, people carry objects that cast shadows on the wall. The prisoners, having never seen anything else, believe these shadows are reality itself. But if one prisoner were freed and brought into the sunlight, he would discover the true forms of things—not shadows, but solid objects, and beyond them, the sun itself, which makes all vision possible (Plato, trans. 1997, Book VII).

For Plato, most of us are like those prisoners. We mistake the changing, imperfect physical world for reality. But the philosopher—the lover of wisdom—seeks to escape the cave and encounter the Forms. The Form of the Good, like the sun in the allegory, illuminates all other Forms and gives them their reality and intelligibility. This Form represents ultimate reality, and knowing it is the highest achievement of human life (Hare, 1982).

Plato's idealism had profound implications for ethics and politics. If true reality exists in a perfect realm beyond the physical, then the goal of human life should be to align ourselves with that higher reality. The body, with its appetites and desires, becomes a prison for the soul. The wise person seeks to free the soul through reason and philosophical contemplation. Political life, too, should be organised according to the Forms—particularly the Form of Justice. The ideal state would be ruled by philosopher-kings who have escaped the cave and understand true reality (Plato, trans. 1997).

1.2.1 Idealism's Development: From Augustine to Hegel

Plato's idealism profoundly influenced Western thought, especially through Christianity. Saint Augustine (354-430 CE) merged Platonic philosophy with Christian theology. For Augustine, God is the ultimate reality—eternal, perfect, unchanging—much like Plato's Form of the Good. The physical world is God's creation, but it is less real than God himself. Human souls, created in God's image, are trapped in sinful bodies and must seek reunion with their divine source (Augustine, trans. 1961).

This Christian Platonism dominated medieval thought, but Idealism took new forms in the modern period. René Descartes (1596-1650) founded modern philosophy by doubting everything except the thinking self. His famous conclusion—"I think, therefore I am"—placed consciousness at the center of philosophy (Descartes, trans. 1996). While Descartes believed in both mind and matter, his emphasis on the thinking subject opened the door to more radical idealisms.

The most comprehensive modern Idealism came from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). For Hegel, reality itself is Spirit (Geist) unfolding through history. Everything that exists—nature, human consciousness, social institutions—is a manifestation of this Absolute Spirit coming to know itself. History is the progressive realisation of freedom as Spirit recognises itself in the world it creates (Hegel, trans. 1977).

Hegel's idealism was not otherworldly like Plato's. He insisted that Spirit is realised in the actual, concrete world. Yet for Hegel, matter is ultimately an expression of mind. The rational is real, and the real is rational. What we call material existence is actually Spirit externalising itself and creating the conditions for its own self-understanding (Taylor, 1975).

1.2.2 Eastern Idealism: A Different Vision of Mind and Reality

While Western Idealism developed its distinctive forms through Plato, Christianity, and German philosophy, parallel idealist

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traditions emerged in India and East Asia, each with its own unique characteristics and profound impact. These Eastern idealisms share the basic premise that consciousness or mind is more fundamental than matter. Still, they arrived at this conclusion through different reasoning and drew different implications for human life (Kalupahana, 1992).

Buddhist Yogacara:

Consciousness-Only: The Yogacara (also called Vijnanavada or "consciousness-only") school of Mahayana Buddhism, developed by Asanga and Vasubandhu (4th-5th century CE), presents perhaps the most rigorous form of idealism in any tradition. Yogacara philosophers argued that all experience consists solely of consciousness and its modifications. What we take to be external objects are actually projections of consciousness itself—there is no matter "out there" independent of mind (Lusthaus, 2002).

Unlike Plato's otherworldly Forms, Yogacara grounds its idealism in careful phenomenological analysis of experience. When we examine any perception, we find only mental content—colours, shapes, sounds—never matter itself. The supposed external world is inferred, never directly known. Yogacara concludes that this inference is unnecessary: consciousness alone, with its capacity to take on various forms, sufficiently explains all experience. The doctrine of "eight consciousnesses" describes how different layers of mental activity generate the appearance of a stable external world, including the "storehouse consciousness" (*alaya-vijnana*), which maintains continuity across experiences (Waldron, 2003).

The practical impact of this philosophy was significant. If suffering arises from our relationship with external objects—grasping at some, avoiding others—then recognising these "objects" as mental projections loosens their hold over us. Liberation comes through understanding the mind-only nature of experience and transforming consciousness at its deepest levels. This made Yogacara both a philosophy and a meditation practice, integrated into the broader Buddhist path (Powers, 1995).

Advaita Vedanta as Idealism: As a non-dualist system, it has often been interpreted—particularly by Western scholars—as a form of Idealism. Shankara's assertion that Brahman is "consciousness-bliss" (sat-chit-ananda) and that the material world is maya (often mistranslated as "illusion") seemed to align with idealist metaphysics (Deutsch, 1969). However, this interpretation is contested. Traditional Advaita does not privilege mind over matter in the Western sense; rather, it claims that both mental and material categories apply only at the empirical level and are transcended in the realisation of non-dual Brahman. Nevertheless, the emphasis on consciousness (chit) as an essential attribute of ultimate reality, and the subordination of the material world to a derivative or dependent status, gave Advaita certain idealist features that influenced its reception and development (Potter, 1981).

The impact of Advaita on Indian culture was profound. It provided philosophical support for renunciation and spiritual seeking, emphasising that true reality lies beyond the material world. This could lead to world-negation, though Shankara himself maintained that empirical reality, while not ultimately real, deserves appropriate engagement. The tension between otherworldly focus and worldly involvement that characterises much of Indian religious life reflects, in part, the influence of Advaita's quasi-idealist metaphysics (Rambachan, 1994).

The Meeting of East and West: Eastern Idealism significantly impacted Western philosophy, particularly from the late 18th century onward. German Romantics and Idealists, including Schopenhauer and Hegel, encountered Indian philosophical texts and found resonances with their own systems. Schopenhauer explicitly acknowledged his debt to the Upanishads, incorporating the concept of maya into his philosophy. He argued that the world we perceive is "representation" (Vorstellung)—a construction of consciousness—while the underlying reality is Will, which he compared to Brahman (Schopenhauer, trans. 1966).

In the 20th century, phenomenology and certain forms of process philosophy were influenced by Buddhist Yogacara thought. The

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emphasis on consciousness as the starting point for philosophy, the careful analysis of the structures of experience, and the rejection of naive realism found in Husserl and later phenomenologists paralleled Yogacara methods. However, the historical connections are debated (Zahavi, 2017).

Divergences and Critiques: Despite surface similarities, Eastern and Western Idealisms differ in crucial ways. Western Idealism typically posits some absolute—Platonic Forms, God, Absolute Spirit—that grounds and guarantees reality. Eastern Idealism, particularly in Buddhism, is more concerned with the practical transformation of consciousness than with establishing metaphysical certainties. Yogacara's "consciousness-only" doctrine serves primarily as a tool for liberation, not as a metaphysical claim about ultimate reality in the Western sense (Lusthaus, 2002).

Moreover, Eastern Idealism generally avoids the radical dualism between appearance and reality that troubles Western systems. In Yogacara, consciousness and its appearances are not two separate things but one process viewed from different angles. Similarly, Advaita's maya is not a simple illusion set against true reality but rather the dynamic power through which Brahman manifests—real at its own level, to be transcended rather than negated (Halbfass, 1995).

The impact of Eastern Idealism extends beyond philosophy into psychology, consciousness studies, and contemporary spirituality. Buddhist analysis of consciousness influenced William James and continues to inform cognitive science and mindfulness-based therapies. The integration of meditation practices derived from idealist philosophies into Western therapeutic and wellness contexts represents a significant cross-cultural influence (Wallace, 2007).

Yet Eastern Idealism also faces criticisms similar to those directed at **Western Idealism**: How do we know that consciousness-only is true rather than simply being one way of interpreting experience? Does emphasis on consciousness as primary undervalue embodiment, material conditions, and social structures? The

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feminist critique that idealist philosophies historically devalued women by associating them with matter and body applies to some Eastern traditions as well. However, the picture is complex and varies across different schools and periods (Young, 1987).

The Materialist Response: From Democritus to Feuerbach

Materialism, as a philosophical tradition, is actually older than Idealism. In ancient Greece, Democritus (460-370 BCE) proposed that reality consists entirely of atoms—tiny, indivisible particles moving through space.

- Democritus's Atomism - Ancient Greek materialism and atoms in motion
- Epicurean Materialism and the Good Life - Epicurus's therapeutic materialism, freedom from fear of death
- Early Modern Materialism: Hobbes and Mechanism - Hobbes's mechanistic view of mind and politics
- French Enlightenment Materialism - Three major thinkers:
 - La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine*
 - D'Holbach's *System of Nature* and atheistic materialism
 - Helvétius's educational egalitarianism
- Feuerbach's Transformative Critique - His projection theory of religion, critique of Hegel, and sensuous humanism
- Impact and Consequences - Effects on science, politics, medicine, ethics, and criticisms

1.3 The Materialist Response: From Democritus to Feuerbach

Materialism, as a philosophical tradition, is actually older than Idealism. In ancient Greece, Democritus (460-370 BCE) proposed that reality consists entirely of atoms—tiny, indivisible particles moving through space. Everything we experience, from stones to souls, is made of atoms arranged in different patterns. There are no

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Forms or spirits, only matter in motion (Russell, 1945). This ancient materialism was revived in the modern period, especially as natural science progressed. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) argued that all phenomena, including human thought, can be explained by matter in motion. The mind is not a separate spiritual substance, as Descartes claimed, but rather the activity of the physical brain. Even our seemingly free choices are determined by physical causes (Hobbes, trans. 1996).

The French Enlightenment produced more sophisticated materialisms. Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751) scandalised Europe by arguing that humans are simply machines—complex machines, to be sure, but machines nonetheless. There is no ghost in the machine, no spiritual soul. We are biological organisms whose thoughts and feelings are products of physical processes (La Mettrie, trans. 1996). But the most influential critique of Idealism came from Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Feuerbach argued that Idealism, especially in its religious forms, inverts reality. Humans create God in their own image, projecting their own best qualities—reason, love, power—onto an imaginary being. Then they worship this projection and feel alienated from their own humanity. Religion is thus a form of self-alienation: we give away our own power to a fiction (Feuerbach, trans. 1957).

Feuerbach insisted we must bring philosophy "down to earth." Instead of seeking truth in heaven or in abstract Forms, we should study actual, physical human beings in their real conditions of life. Materialism, for Feuerbach, was not a rejection of human values but rather their proper grounding. Love, justice, and beauty are real—not because they exist in a Platonic heaven, but because they are part of human life as embodied, social beings (Wartofsky, 1977).

1.3.1 Marx's Dialectical Materialism: Matter in Motion

Karl Marx (1818-1883) transformed materialism into a comprehensive theory of history and society. Marx began his intellectual life as a follower of Hegel, accepting the idea that history unfolds dialectically through conflict and resolution. But Marx

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famously declared that Hegel's system was "standing on its head" and needed to be "turned right side up" (Marx, trans. 1978, p. 4).

For Marx, Hegel was correct that history moves through contradictions toward greater freedom. But Hegel mistakenly thought this was the movement of Spirit or consciousness. Marx argued that material conditions—how people produce the necessities of life—drive historical change. Consciousness does not determine existence; instead, social existence determines consciousness (Marx, trans. 1978). This is the core of historical materialism: the way a society organises its economic production determines its political structures, legal systems, religious beliefs, and cultural forms. In feudal society, for instance, the dominant economic relationship was between lords who owned land and serfs who worked it. This material base generated an ideology that justified the arrangement—religious teachings about divine order, noble birth, and obedience to authority (Marx & Engels, trans. 1998).

Marx identified capitalism as the latest stage in this historical development. Under capitalism, the key relationship is between those who own the means of production (capitalists) and those who must sell their labour power to survive (workers). This creates a fundamental contradiction: workers produce more value than they receive in wages, and this surplus value is appropriated by capitalists as profit. The system inherently exploits workers while generating immense productivity (Marx, trans. 1990).

For Marx, this exploitation was not primarily a moral failing but a structural feature of the economic system. As long as production is organised to generate private profit rather than meet human needs, exploitation will continue. The solution is not to change people's consciousness or appeal to higher ideals, but to transform the material conditions—to overthrow capitalism and establish collective ownership of the means of production (Marx & Engels, trans. 1998).

Marx's dialectical materialism thus rejects both Platonic idealism

and simple mechanical materialism. Reality is material, but matter is not static—it is constantly changing through internal contradictions. Human history is the story of how humans transform nature through labour, and in doing so, transform themselves. Eventually, Marx believed, the contradictions of capitalism would lead to its collapse and replacement by communism—a society of freedom, equality, and abundance (Singer, 2000).

1.4 Comparative Analysis: Metaphysical Idealism vs. Dialectical Materialism

At first glance, Idealism and Materialism seem to be complete opposites. One says reality is fundamentally mental or spiritual; the other says it is fundamentally physical. One looks upward to eternal Forms or to God; the other looks downward to atoms and economic relations. Yet despite their differences, both traditions share certain assumptions that reveal their common ground in Western thought.

Dimension	Metaphysical Idealism	Dialectical Materialism
Primary Reality	Spirit, Mind, or Idea	Matter, motion, and energy
Source of Knowledge	Intuition, reason, or divine illumination	Sensory experience, labour, and social praxis
Nature of Consciousness	Independent, eternal, creative	Product of material conditions
Change and Development	Unfolding of Spirit (Hegel)	Dialectic of material contradictions (Marx)
Freedom	Rational self-realisation	Emancipation from material alienation
Goal of History	Self-knowledge of Spirit	Classless society/end of exploitation

First, both are reductionist. Idealism reduces everything to mind or spirit; materialism reduces everything to matter. Each claims to have

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found the single, fundamental reality that explains everything else. Plato reduces the physical world to imperfect shadows of Forms. Marx reduces religion, art, and law to expressions of economic relations. Both approaches simplify the complex reality of human experience by explaining it in terms of a single principle (Whitehead, 1929).

Second, both tend toward determinism. In Plato's system, the Forms are eternal and unchanging, providing a fixed blueprint for reality. In Marx's system, economic structures determine consciousness, and historical development follows necessary laws. While Marx claimed his materialism was dialectical and historical, critics have noted that his theory often treats economic factors as strictly determining all other social phenomena, leaving little room for human agency or creativity (Popper, 1962).

Third, both create hierarchies of value. For Plato, the realm of Forms is superior to the physical world, and reason is superior to the body. For Marx, the economic base is more fundamental than the cultural superstructure, and material production is more real than ideas or consciousness. Each system privileges one dimension of human experience while devaluing others (Sorell, 1991).

Fourth, both promise salvation through knowledge. Plato's philosopher escapes the cave by understanding the Forms. Marx's revolution overcomes false consciousness by understanding the laws of history. In both cases, certain truths are hidden from ordinary people, and liberation comes through enlightenment—either philosophical contemplation or scientific socialism (Berlin, 1963).

1.5 The Human Consequences of Dualistic Thought

The opposition between Idealism and Materialism is not merely an academic debate. When these philosophies become the basis for organising societies, they produce real consequences for human life. History shows that taking either position to its extreme can lead to alienation, exploitation, and the disintegration of human wholeness.

Alienation from the Body: Idealism, with its emphasis on the spiritual over the physical, has often led to a rejection or suppression of bodily existence. In Platonic and Christian traditions, the body is seen as a source of temptation and error, something to be controlled or transcended. This has contributed to oppressive attitudes toward sexuality, pleasure, and physical needs. It has also devalued work and workers, since physical labour is associated with the body rather than the mind (Foucault, 1978).

Alienation from the World: When idealism treats the physical world as less real or less valuable than spiritual reality, it can foster indifference to material conditions. If actual reality lies in heaven or in abstract ideas, why should we care about poverty, suffering, or environmental destruction? This otherworldly focus has sometimes been used to justify accepting injustice in the present life while awaiting rewards in an afterlife (Nietzsche, trans. 1989).

Alienation from Meaning: Materialism, in turn, struggles to account for consciousness, value, and meaning. If reality is nothing but matter in motion, what are we to make of love, beauty, justice, and purpose? Materialist philosophies sometimes reduce these to mere epiphenomena—illusions produced by brain chemistry or ideology masking economic interests. This can leave people feeling that their most profound experiences are not fully real or valid (Nagel, 1986).

Economic Exploitation: Marx's analysis reveals how capitalist materialism treats human beings as mere factors of production. Workers become commodities, valued only for the labour power they can sell. The rich complexity of human life—creativity, relationships, spiritual aspirations—is subordinated to the demands of economic efficiency and profit maximisation. Yet Marx's own system, when implemented in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, sometimes replicated these problems by reducing human life to economic production in a different form (Arendt, 1951).

Social Disintegration: The dualism between mind and matter, ideal and real, has fractured human understanding into competing

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domains. Science studies material causes but says nothing about meaning or purpose. Religion speaks of meaning but is disconnected from empirical reality. Politics focuses on power and interests, while ethics appeals to abstract principles. We lack a unified vision that integrates these different dimensions of human experience (MacIntyre, 1981). Perhaps most tragically, the idealism-materialism divide creates false choices. Must we choose between honouring the spiritual and respecting the physical? Between individual consciousness and social structures? Between timeless truths and historical change? These dualisms impoverish our understanding and limit our capacity to create lives and societies that honour the full range of human experience (Latour, 1993).

Ecological Crisis: As the Material Consequence of Dualism, the environmental crisis of the modern era is the material manifestation of metaphysical division. Viewing nature as inert matter to be exploited, humanity has disrupted the balance of ecosystems and the climate itself. Idealist religions, emphasising salvation beyond the world, neglected the Earth's sanctity; materialist economics, obsessed with growth, consumed it. As scholars of ecological philosophy observe, this crisis reflects an epistemic pathology—the failure to recognise the interdependence of all beings (Capra, 1996). The modern human stands estranged not only from others but from the very ground of existence. The split between self and world has become an existential wound.

The Psychological Cost: At the individual level, dualistic thinking breeds anxiety and purposelessness. When reality is divided between an unattainable ideal and an indifferent materiality, life loses coherence. The human being becomes a seeker torn between faith and doubt, consumption and emptiness. Fromm (1961) called this “the pathology of normalcy” — a condition in which alienation is so pervasive that it feels natural. In this vacuum, humanity seeks refuge in ideologies, markets, or technologies — substitutes for meaning. Yet these cannot heal the split because they arise from it. The spiritual yearning for idealism and the pragmatic drive toward materialism both point to an unmet need: an integrated

understanding—a worldview in which consciousness and matter are not opposites but aspects of a single, harmonious reality.

1.6 Toward Co-Existence:

Beyond the Extremes, the dialectic between idealism and materialism has exhausted itself. Neither the pursuit of divine perfection nor the conquest of material conditions has delivered wholeness. The twenty-first century stands at a civilisational threshold, where humanity's survival depends on transcending this dualism. Philosophical traditions outside the Western canon — particularly in India — have long intuited a non-dual understanding of existence. Concepts like *Advaita* (non-duality), *Rta* (cosmic order), and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world as one family) express the insight that reality is co-existent, not conflictual. Yet these insights remained essentially metaphysical until rearticulated in the systematic realism of Madhyasth Darshan (Sah-Astitvvaad) by A. Nagraj. Co-existentialism (Sah-Astitvavaad), a comprehensive study of the human being, has remained a central inquiry in both philosophy and science. In modern intellectual traditions, attempts to understand the human being have primarily evolved along two dominant streams. On one hand is the physical–chemical, object-centred scientific method based on instability and uncertainty; on the other hand is the mystical and idealistic mode of thought. The materialistic perspective views the human being merely as a biological structure and a collection of chemical processes. In contrast, the idealistic perspective seeks to explain human existence through supernatural, mystical, or predetermined forces. In both approaches, the study of the human being remains fragmented and incomplete.

According to Madhyasth Darshan/Jeevan Vidya, the fundamental limitation of these two streams lies in defining the human being merely as a *living organism(physico-chemical)*. Such a definition fails to distinguish the qualitative differences between human beings and other living creatures, including discrimination, understanding, value consciousness, purposefulness, and the capacity to recognise and live in relationships. Consequently, solutions to human

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problems remain confined to biological control, technological advancement, or moral preaching, while the root causes of human dissatisfaction, familial disintegration, and social disorder persist unresolved. (A Nagraj, Vikalp, 2016) Jeevan Vidya asserts that the human being is not merely a biological organism but a conscious entity endowed with understanding, whose identity lies in the co-existence of the body and consciousness (life). Madhyasth Darshan accepts existence as co-existence, wherein both the material (inanimate) and conscious realms exist in an orderly manner according to their inherent laws. From this perspective, the study of the human being is neither restricted to physical-chemical analysis nor dependent on mystical experiences; instead, it presents a holistic scientific method grounded in experience, verification, and validation.

According to Madhyasth Darshan, the fundamental human need is not limited to material comfort and physical facilities, but extends to right understanding, value-oriented conduct, and harmony in relationships. When a human being recognises oneself not merely as a living organism but as a conscious being, harmonious coexistence with family, society, and nature becomes possible. On this basis, Jeevan Vidya provides a theoretical framework for reorganising human behaviour, ethics, education, and social systems.

The present research, grounded in the theoretical foundations of Madhyasth Darshan/Jeevan Vidya, critically examines the limitations of prevailing materialistic and idealistic approaches to human studies and explores the possibility of understanding the human being as a conscious, value-oriented, and coexistential entity. This study seeks to offer an alternative, comprehensive, and scientifically consistent perspective for addressing contemporary human problems. Madhyasth Darshan recognises existence as co-existence — a self-organising, relational whole in which every unit has its place and purpose. Consciousness and matter are not adversaries but mutually fulfilling realities. Knowledge arises not from abstraction or reaction but from realisation (Anubhav) — direct understanding of harmony in existence. This perspective

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dissolves the dualism that has plagued human thought for millennia. Where idealism exalts the idea and materialism exalts matter, co-existence honours the relation between them. It redefines progress as qualitative enrichment, not quantitative accumulation; freedom as understanding, not opposition; and civilisation as the unfolding of mutual happiness (sah-astitva-sukh).

Conclusion

An oscillation between Idealism and Materialism has dominated the Western philosophical tradition. Each offers essential insights: Idealism reminds us that consciousness, meaning, and values are fundamental; Materialism grounds us in the physical conditions of existence and reveals how power operates through material relations. Yet each, taken alone, is incomplete and potentially distortive. The human costs of this dualism suggest the need for a different approach—one that does not reduce reality to either mind or matter, but recognises the irreducible complexity of existence. Such an approach would need to move beyond the either/or logic that has dominated Western thought and embrace a more integrative understanding. As we will see in the next chapter, these points point toward the possibility of a third paradigm, one that might dissolve rather than resolve the opposition between Idealism and Materialism. The following chapters will explore this transition in depth, tracing how Madhyasth Darshan offers a coherent alternative that integrates knowledge, behaviour, and systems into a unified human order. However, the first step is recognising that, in isolation, both idealism and materialism have revealed the limitations of partial vision. The next stage of philosophy — and of humanity — must be the realisation of wholeness within existence itself.

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Chapter 2: Beyond Dualism - The Need for a Third Paradigm

The history of Western philosophy can be read, in large measure, as an extended argument between two opposing visions of reality. On one side stands Idealism, which locates the ground of existence in mind, spirit, or consciousness — asserting that the material world is either derived from, or intelligible only through, some prior immaterial principle. On the other side stands Materialism, which insists that matter is the only genuine reality and that consciousness, meaning, and value are ultimately reducible to physical processes. These two traditions have produced some of the most sophisticated intellectual achievements in human history, from Plato's theory of Forms to Hegel's dialectic of Spirit, from Democritus's atomism to Marx's historical materialism. Yet despite — and perhaps because of — their sophistication, they have remained locked in opposition, each defining itself largely in contrast to the other. The consequence of this prolonged opposition is not merely academic. It has shaped how entire civilisations have understood the relationship between the individual and the cosmos, between mind and body, between human beings and the natural world. As Radhakrishnan observed, the great need of our time is not a refinement of either tradition but a radical reorientation of the very framework within which these questions are asked (Radhakrishnan, 1923). To understand why, we must first appreciate the depth of the philosophical limitations on both sides. Idealism, in its many forms — Platonic, Kantian, Hegelian, or Vedantic in its more exclusivist readings — tends toward a fundamental alienation from the lived, embodied, relational world. When reality is identified solely with the Idea, the Form, or the Absolute, the material world is rendered secondary, derivative, or even illusory. The consequence is not merely an epistemological problem but an existential and ethical one: the world of relationships, ecological interdependence, sensory experience, and bodily need is systematically devalued. Contemplation is elevated above participation; hierarchy is

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naturalised in the name of cosmic order; and human beings find themselves estranged from the very world in which they must live and act. Plato's philosopher-king retreats to the realm of pure intellect; the Cartesian subject is marooned in its own interiority; the Hegelian Absolute Spirit absorbs the particular into the universal without remainder. In each case, transcendence is purchased at the price of concrete human life (Taylor, 1975). Idealism, for all its grandeur, breeds passivity in the name of contemplation and produces moral elevation that simultaneously estranges humanity from its own material and relational ground.

Materialism, in its turn, overcorrects in the opposite direction, producing its own characteristic distortions. By reducing all of reality to matter in motion — whether in the mechanistic form of early modern science, the dialectical form of Marxist historical analysis, or the reductionist form of contemporary physicalism — Materialism struggles fundamentally to account for consciousness, meaning, intentionality, and value. The so-called "hard problem of consciousness," articulated in contemporary philosophy of mind, is not a technical puzzle awaiting a technical solution; it is a symptom of a deeper conceptual inadequacy (Chalmers, 1996). When we explain away rather than explain consciousness, when we reduce love, justice, and beauty to neurochemical events or economic relations, we do not illuminate human experience — we dissolve it. Moreover, Materialism's implicit assumption that reality is fundamentally competitive, that nature is a field of struggle for scarce resources, has provided philosophical justification for exploitative economic systems, ecological destruction, and the reduction of human beings to units of productive capacity. As Whitehead noted, the materialist worldview that dominated modern Western science produced a bifurcation of nature — a severing of the experienced world from the world described by physics — that has had profound and damaging consequences for both human self-understanding and for humanity's relationship with the natural order (Whitehead, 1920).

It might be supposed that the Hegelian dialectic offers a resolution

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to this impasse. Hegel, after all, explicitly sought to overcome static oppositions by showing how thesis and antithesis are sublated (*aufgehoben*) into a higher synthesis. Marx, in turn, appropriated the dialectical method and applied it to material history, seeking to overcome the opposition between labour and capital through the movement of history itself. Yet, as this chapter will argue, the dialectical framework — despite its dynamism — remains trapped within the very dualism it seeks to overcome. The synthesis of the dialectic is always already contaminated by conflict; it is opposition that drives the movement forward, and so opposition is never genuinely resolved but merely deferred to the next stage. The dialectic does not transcend dualism — it perpetuates it at a higher level of abstraction (Adorno, 1966). What is needed is not a more sophisticated version of dialectical opposition but a genuinely different philosophical starting point: one that does not begin with separation and then attempt to reconcile, but rather begins with relationship, coexistence, and mutual fulfilment as the fundamental character of reality itself.

It is precisely this different starting point that certain streams of Indian philosophy have long explored, and that the contemporary Indian philosopher A. Nagraj has systematised into a rigorous and comprehensive alternative framework known as *Madhyasth Darshan* — *Sah-Astitvavad*, or the Philosophy of Co-Existence. Unlike the Western dialectical tradition, which oscillates between the primacy of consciousness and the primacy of matter, *Madhyasth Darshan* begins with the insight that existence itself is neither reducible to mind nor to matter, but is constituted by the coexistence of *Prakriti* (nature, the material order) within *Vyapak* (the all-pervasive, space-like ground of being). Existence, on this account, is not a conflict between opposing principles but an expression of inherent relatedness; every unit of reality is in a relationship of mutual participation with every other, and the foundational activity of existence is not struggle but *sanyam* — self-regulation in harmony with the whole (Nagraj, 1999). This is not a compromise between Idealism and Materialism, nor is it a dialectical synthesis

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that secretly preserves the original opposition. It is a third paradigm — a genuinely new framework that reconfigures the questions themselves.

The significance of this third paradigm extends well beyond academic philosophy. At a moment when humanity faces converging crises — ecological breakdown, social fragmentation, the failure of both market-materialist and ideologically idealist political projects — the question of what kind of philosophical foundation can support a genuinely sustainable, just, and meaningful human civilisation is not abstract. It is the most pressing practical question of our time. Both Idealism and Materialism, in their dominant forms, have been tried as civilisational foundations, and both have produced characteristic pathologies: the former producing otherworldly passivity, rigid hierarchy, and the devaluation of material life; the latter producing ecological destruction, the commodification of persons, and the impoverishment of inner life. The need for a third paradigm — one that can hold together the material and the conscious, the individual and the universal, the human and the natural, not by collapsing one into the other but by understanding their coexistence as the very structure of reality — has never been more urgent. The following sections of this chapter undertake the philosophical work of developing that paradigm, drawing on the resources of Indian philosophical tradition and the systematic contributions of A. Nagraj's Madhyasth Darshan, toward what we may call a philosophy of universal co-existence and mutual fulfilment (*parasparata*).

2.1 The Philosophical Limitations of Idealism and Materialism

Both Idealism and Materialism claim to provide comprehensive accounts of reality, but each faces serious philosophical problems that its adherents have struggled to resolve. These are not minor technical difficulties but fundamental challenges that suggest the inadequacy of both approaches.

2.1.1 The Problem of Other Minds in Idealism: If reality is

fundamentally mental or consists of ideas, how do I know that other minds exist? Descartes could be certain only of his own thinking self. Everything else, including other people, might be products of his imagination. Later idealists tried various solutions to this problem, but none proved satisfactory. Berkeley appealed to God as the mind that maintains the existence of things when no human is perceiving them. Hegel argued that individual minds are manifestations of a larger Absolute Spirit. But these solutions raise more questions than they answer (Williams, 1978). The problem goes deeper than scepticism about other minds. If consciousness is primary and matter is derivative, how does the mind interact with the physical world? How do my mental intentions cause my body to move? Descartes famously struggled with this question and proposed that mind and body interact through the pineal gland—a solution that satisfied almost no one. The mind-body problem has haunted Idealism ever since (Ryle, 1949).

2.1.2 The Hard Problem of Consciousness in Materialism:

Materialism faces its own version of the mind-body problem, often called "the hard problem of consciousness." If reality consists only of physical matter governed by causal laws, how do we account for subjective experience? Why is there "something it is like" to see red, feel pain, or taste chocolate? (Chalmers, 1996). Materialists have proposed various solutions. Some argue that consciousness is an illusion—there really is no subjective experience, only physical processes that give rise to the appearance of awareness. But this seems to deny the most obvious fact of our existence. Others claim that consciousness "emerges" from complex physical systems, like the brain. But emergence is often just a label for phenomena we do not yet understand. How exactly does the feeling of pain emerge from neurons firing? The gap between physical processes and felt experience remains unbridged (Levine, 1983).

2.1.3 The Problem of Values: Both traditions struggle to account for moral, aesthetic, and spiritual values. Idealism locates values in a transcendent realm (Plato's Forms) or in God's will. But this makes values external to human life, raising the question of how we access

them. If the Form of the Good exists in a separate realm, how does it guide our earthly conduct? And if God commands specific actions, is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good? Either answer creates difficulties (Mackie, 1977). Materialism fares no better. If reality consists only of physical matter and causal laws, where do values fit? Some materialists argue that values are merely subjective preferences shaped by evolution and culture. But this makes morality arbitrary—there is no genuine right or wrong, only different opinions or social conventions. Others try to derive values from facts about human flourishing or social cooperation. But the gap between "is" and "ought"—between descriptive facts and prescriptive norms—proves difficult to bridge (Hume, trans. 1978).

2.1.4 The Problem of Reductionism: As noted in the previous chapter, both Idealism and Materialism are reductionist. They attempt to explain all phenomena in terms of a single fundamental reality—either mind or matter. But reality seems irreducibly complex. Human experience involves both consciousness and physical embodiment, both individual agency and social structures, both material needs and spiritual aspirations. Any philosophy that reduces this complexity to a single dimension will inevitably distort our understanding (Nagel, 1986). Reductionism also tends toward determinism. If everything can be explained by eternal Forms or by causal laws operating on matter, where is human freedom? Idealism sometimes treats individual humans as mere manifestations of the Absolute Spirit. Materialism often treats our choices as products of prior causes—genes, environment, brain chemistry. Both approaches struggle to accommodate the experience of genuine agency and responsibility (Kane, 1996).

2.2 The Dialectical Trap: Thesis – Antithesis – Conflict

One might think that dialectical philosophy, especially as developed by Hegel and Marx, provides a way beyond the opposition between Idealism and Materialism. After all, dialectical thinking is precisely about overcoming contradictions through synthesis. However, a

closer examination reveals that dialectics often reinforces rather than resolves dualistic thinking.

2.2.1 Hegel's Dialectic: Hegel proposed that reality develops through a dialectical process: a thesis gives rise to its opposite (antithesis), and the conflict between them is resolved in a higher synthesis that preserves elements of both while transcending their opposition. For example, in Hegel's philosophy of history, different civilisations represent different stages in Spirit's self-realisation. Each stage contains internal contradictions that lead to its collapse and replacement by a higher stage (Hegel, trans. 1977). This sounds promising—a method for moving beyond oppositions. But Hegel's dialectic has several problems. First, it treats conflict as the engine of progress. Every thesis must generate its antithesis, and the two must struggle before synthesis emerges. This makes opposition and struggle necessary features of reality. Peace, harmony, or coexistence appear only as temporary moments in an ongoing process of conflict (Taylor, 1975).

Second, Hegel's synthesis is never final. The synthesis of thesis and antithesis itself becomes a new thesis, generating a new antithesis, and the process continues. History is an endless series of conflicts and partial resolutions, always driving toward but never reaching ultimate unity. This creates a restless, unsatisfied quality to existence—we are always overcoming contradictions but never arriving at wholeness (Kojève, 1969).

Third, Hegel's dialectic privileges negation and opposition. Development occurs through negation—each stage negates the previous stage, while also preserving elements of it. This makes negativity productive and even necessary. But what if reality also contains non-oppositional relationships? What if difference does not always entail opposition? Hegel's framework makes it difficult to recognise forms of diversity that coexist peacefully rather than struggling for dominance (Deleuze, 1994).

2.2.2 Marx's Dialectical Materialism: Marx adapted Hegel's dialectic to material conditions, analysing history through class

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struggle. Enslaved person and master, lord and serf, bourgeoisie and proletariat—each epoch is defined by antagonistic classes whose conflict drives historical change. This framework brilliantly illuminates the dynamics of power and exploitation in human societies (Marx & Engels, trans. 1998).

But Marx's dialectic also embeds conflict into the structure of social reality. Classes are defined by their opposed interests—what benefits the bourgeoisie harms the proletariat, and vice versa. There is no common good that transcends class divisions; any appearance of shared interests is ideological mystification. Change comes only through struggle, ultimately violent revolution. While Marx envisioned a communist future beyond class conflict, the path to it is paved with antagonism (Avineri, 1968).

Furthermore, Marx's economic determinism reduces non-economic dimensions of life—culture, religion, art, personal relationships—to expressions of material conditions and class interests. This creates its own form of reductionism, different from mechanical materialism but equally problematic. Human life is more complex than economic relations, and meaning cannot be reduced to class struggle (Arendt, 1958).

2.2.3 The Limits of Dialectical Resolution: The deeper problem with dialectical thinking is that it remains trapped within oppositional logic. Their mutual opposition defines thesis and antithesis. The synthesis overcomes this particular opposition but does so by subsuming both terms into a higher unity that itself becomes a new thesis. The form of thinking remains dualistic—it just operates at higher levels of abstraction (Adorno, 1973).

What if the problem is not that we need better syntheses, but that we need to question the assumption that reality must be structured by opposition? What if there are ways of thinking that do not require thesis and antithesis, negation and sublation? What if multiplicity and difference can coexist without conflict? These questions point beyond dialectics toward a genuinely different paradigm (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

2.2.4 The Human Cost of Dialectical Thinking: This structural dualism has profound consequences. In personal life, it manifests as inner conflict—mind against body, reason against emotion. In society, it appears as class warfare, nationalism, and ideological polarisation. In ecology, it becomes humanity’s war against nature.

The dialectic’s promise of synthesis repeatedly collapses into renewed opposition because it lacks the vision of intrinsic harmony. The world is not a perpetual conflict seeking balance, but a balance occasionally disturbed by conflict. To recognise this inversion is to move toward a new paradigm—one that transcends negation through understanding rather than sublation.

2.3 Seeds of Synthesis in Indian Philosophy

The limitations of Western dualism and dialectical materialism prompt us to revisit the Indian philosophical landscape, which, for millennia, has explored integrative frameworks that transcend the binary between spirit and matter. While diverse in expression, the Indian traditions share a foundational intuition: Reality is one, interrelated, and self-existent (Madhyastha Darshan).

While Western philosophy has been dominated by dualistic thinking, Indian philosophical traditions developed frameworks that may offer resources for transcending the opposition between Idealism and Materialism. It is essential to approach these traditions carefully, avoiding both romanticisation and oversimplification. Indian philosophy is not a single unified system but rather a diverse array of schools with significant disagreements among them. Nevertheless, specific common themes and distinctive approaches appear across multiple traditions (Hiriyanna, 1993).

Below, we consider four key systems—*Advaita Vedānta*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Buddhism*, and *Jain Anekāntavāda*—each of which offers profound insights into the logic of coexistence that later culminates, in contemporary times, in *Madhyasth Darshan* (*Sah-Astitvvaad*).

2.3.1 Advaita Vedanta: Non-Dualism: As systematised by Adi Shankaracharya (8th century CE), Advaita Vedanta offers a

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sophisticated non-dualistic metaphysics. "Advaita" means "not-two"—the ultimate reality (Brahman) is non-dual, without parts or divisions. The apparent multiplicity of the world, including the distinction between subject and object, mind and matter, is maya—not exactly illusion, but a misleading appearance that obscures the underlying unity (Deutsch, 1969). Crucially, Advaita is neither Idealism nor Materialism in the Western sense. It does not claim that only mind exists (Idealism) or that only matter exists (Materialism). Rather, it suggests that the categories of mind and matter themselves are conceptual constructs that apply only at the empirical level of everyday experience. At the ultimate level of reality, such distinctions dissolve. Brahman is neither mental nor physical—it is the ground of both, the undifferentiated consciousness-being from which all apparent diversity arises (Potter, 1981).

This may sound like a form of Idealism, and indeed some Western scholars have interpreted it that way. But Advaita does not privilege mind over matter. The point is that both mind and matter, as we ordinarily understand them, belong to the realm of maya. Liberation (moksha) comes not from escaping matter to reach spirit, but from recognising that the distinction itself is not ultimately real. The self (Atman) is identical with Brahman—no separate soul is needed to escape from or transcend the body (Radhakrishnan, 1923).

2.3.1 Samkhya: Purusha and Prakriti: Samkhya, one of the oldest Indian philosophical systems, presents a dualistic framework that differs significantly from Western dualisms. It posits two fundamental principles: Purusha (consciousness, the witnessing self) and Prakriti (primordial matter-energy). Unlike Western dualisms, however, Purusha and Prakriti are not opposed to or in conflict with one another. Rather, they are complementary principles that coexist and interact to produce the manifest world (Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987).

Prakriti is not inert matter acted upon by spirit; it is dynamic, creative, and self-organising. It contains three gunas (qualities): sattva (harmony, clarity), rajas (activity, passion), and tamas (inertia, darkness). All material and mental phenomena arise from

different combinations of these gunas. Importantly, mind (manas) is part of Prakriti, not Purusha. Consciousness (Purusha) is pure awareness, the unchanging witness of all that occurs within Prakriti (Chakravarti, 1975).

This framework avoids the mind-body problem that plagues Western philosophy. There is no question of how the mind interacts with matter because the mind is itself a subtle form of matter (Prakriti). The confusion arises when Purusha (pure consciousness) misidentifies with aspects of Prakriti (body, mind, ego) and thus becomes entangled in suffering. Liberation comes from discrimination—recognising that one's true nature is Purusha, distinct from yet not opposed to Prakriti (Larson, 1979).

2.3.2 Buddhist Middle Way: Neither Existence Nor Non-Existence: Buddhist philosophy offers another distinctive approach, particularly in the Madhyamaka school founded by Nagarjuna (2nd century CE). Madhyamaka means "middle way"—not in the sense of compromise between extremes, but as a path that avoids all extreme views, including the extreme of moderation itself (Garfield, 1995).

Nagarjuna systematically deconstructs all philosophical positions, including both Idealism and Materialism. Things do not exist in the absolute sense that Idealism claims (eternal Forms, unchanging self), nor do they exist as independent, self-standing entities in the way that Materialism assumes. Rather, all phenomena are "empty" (shunya) of inherent existence—they arise dependently through causes and conditions and lack any independent, unchanging essence (Nagarjuna, trans. 1995). This is not nihilism—Nagarjuna is not saying that nothing exists. Phenomena are real at the conventional level. We experience tables, chairs, thoughts, and feelings, and these experiences are valid within their context. But these things do not possess the kind of inherent, independent existence that both Idealism and Materialism attribute to their fundamental realities (Forms, God, atoms, matter) (Westerhoff, 2009).

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Emptiness is itself empty—there is no ultimate reality behind appearances, whether mental or material. This radical rejection of metaphysical foundations might seem destructive, but it opens space for a more flexible, contextual understanding of reality. Things are interdependent processes, not fixed substances. Mind and matter are not opposing substances but mutually dependent aspects of experience (Huntington, 1989).

2.3.3 Jain Anekāntavāda: The Doctrine of Many-Sidedness: Jain philosophy contributes the doctrine of Anekāntavāda (non-one-sidedness) and Syādvāda (conditional predication). According to this view, reality is infinitely complex, and any single viewpoint captures only one aspect of it. Truth is not found by choosing one perspective and rejecting others, but by recognising that multiple perspectives can each be partially valid (Matilal, 1981).

The classic Jain parable illustrates this: Several blind men encounter an elephant. One touches the trunk and says the elephant is like a rope. Another touches the leg and says it is like a pillar. A third touches the side and says it is like a wall. Each is correct from their limited perspective, but each is also incorrect if they claim their perspective is complete. The elephant is all of these and more (Koller, 2002).

Applied to the Idealism-Materialism debate, Anekāntavāda suggests that neither view is wrong, but neither is complete. Reality has mental aspects and material aspects, and these can be validly described from different standpoints. The error is not in recognising these different aspects but in claiming that one aspect is the whole truth. A comprehensive understanding requires integrating multiple perspectives while recognising that our concepts can never fully capture reality's infinite complexity (Ganeri, 2001).

2.3.4 Common Themes in Indian Approaches: Despite their differences, these Indian philosophical traditions share certain features that distinguish them from Western dualism:

1. **Holism over Reductionism:** Rather than reducing reality to a single principle (mind or matter), these traditions recognise

irreducible complexity and interdependence.

2. **Complementarity over Opposition:** Where Western thought tends to see mutually exclusive alternatives (either mind or matter), Indian thought often sees complementary aspects (both/and rather than either/or).
3. **Practical Orientation:** Indian philosophy is not purely speculative but oriented toward liberation, flourishing, and the alleviation of suffering. The test of a philosophy is not just logical consistency but its capacity to transform human life (Matilal, 1986).
4. **Contextual Truth:** Truth is not absolute and context-independent but varies according to the level of understanding and purpose of inquiry. What is true at one level may need to be transcended at another.

These features suggest possibilities for moving beyond Western dualism—not by choosing between Idealism and Materialism or synthesising them dialectically, but by dissolving the framework that generates such oppositions in the first place.

2.4 Toward a Third Paradigm- Co-Existence to Universal Understanding

Across these Indian systems, one perceives a gradual movement from **duality to relationality**. Sāṃkhya offers a balance between spirit and matter; Advaita transcends them into unity; Buddhism interrelates them through dependence; Jainism diversifies them through perspectives. Each provides a fragment of a larger synthesis—a worldview in which reality is neither one nor two, neither mind nor matter, but relationship itself.

The limitations of Idealism and Materialism, the traps of dialectical thinking, and the insights from Indian philosophy all point toward the need for a genuinely different approach. This third paradigm transcends dualistic thinking. What would such a paradigm look like?

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First, it would be integrative rather than reductive. Instead of explaining everything in terms of a single fundamental reality (mind or matter), it would recognise that reality has multiple, irreducible dimensions. Consciousness and material conditions, individual agency and social structures, facts and values—all are real and require understanding on their own terms while also recognising their interdependence.

Second, it would be relational rather than substantialist. Instead of viewing reality as composed of independent substances (whether atoms or spirits), it would understand things as constituted by their relationships. Nothing exists in isolation; everything arises through its connections with other things. This shift from substance to process, from being to becoming, is already underway in various areas of contemporary thought (Whitehead, 1929).

Third, it would be contextual rather than absolute. Different ways of understanding (scientific, ethical, aesthetic, spiritual) would be recognised as valid within their proper contexts, without needing to reduce one to another or arrange them in a hierarchy. This requires epistemological humility—acknowledging that our concepts and categories are tools for engaging with reality, not perfect mirrors of reality itself (Putnam, 1981).

Fourth, it would be practical rather than purely theoretical. Following the Indian philosophical emphasis on liberation and flourishing, this paradigm would be evaluated not just by logical consistency but by its capacity to help humans live well, both individually and collectively. Philosophy would rejoin its ancient vocation as a way of life rather than merely an academic discipline (Hadot, 1995).

Fifth, it would be inclusive rather than exclusive. Instead of demanding that we choose between competing systems, it would recognise that different philosophical traditions offer valuable insights that can enrich one another. This is not uncritical eclecticism but thoughtful integration that respects the integrity of different approaches while remaining open to mutual learning

(Panikkar, 1979).

Such a paradigm would not eliminate disagreement or render all views equivalent. Some positions would remain incompatible, and reasoned argument would still be necessary. But the goal would shift from proving one view right and all others wrong, to developing the most comprehensive and practical understanding possible—one that does justice to the full complexity of human experience.

Yet, these insights remain scattered. What is needed is a philosophical articulation of coexistence that is both ontologically precise and experientially grounded—a framework that unites knowledge (*jñāna*), conduct (*vyavahāra*), and organisation (*vyavasthā*). In the modern Indian context, this integration takes systematic form in Madhyasth Darshan (Sah-Astivvaad), which proposes that existence is the coexistence of all units in space, and that human fulfilment lies in realising this relational order through understanding, not conflict (Nagraj, 2015).

Thus, the “third paradigm” is not a synthesis in the Hegelian sense but a resolution through realisation—an awakening to the already harmonious order of existence. It transcends dualism not by merging opposites but by recognising their inseparable complementarity.

2.5 A. Nagraj's Philosophy of Co-Existence: A Contemporary Alternative

While traditional Indian philosophies provide valuable resources for transcending Western dualism, they were formulated in contexts vastly different from our contemporary global reality. What is needed is a philosophical framework that addresses modern challenges—ecological crisis, social fragmentation, technological transformation, and existential meaninglessness—while drawing upon and systematising insights from both Eastern and Western traditions. A. Nagraj's Madhyasth Darshan (Philosophy of Co-existence) represents precisely such an attempt (Nagraj, 2015, P.1).

The Life and Vision of A. Nagraj

A. Nagraj (1920-2016) was an Indian philosopher, social reformer,

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and spiritual teacher who spent decades developing what he called Madhyasth Darshan or Sah-Astitvvaad (Co-Existential Philosophy). Born in colonial India and witnessing the struggles of independence, partition, and modernisation, Nagraj observed the profound dislocations created when traditional ways of life encounter Western modernity. He recognised that neither wholesale rejection of tradition nor uncritical adoption of Western frameworks could address humanity's deepest needs ().

Through sustained contemplation and what he described as experiential realisation (anubhav), Nagraj articulated a comprehensive philosophical system that addresses metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, psychology, economics, and social organisation. His work remained largely unknown outside India during his lifetime but has gradually attracted attention from scholars seeking alternatives to dominant paradigms (Jain, 2019).

Co-Existence as Ontological Reality

The foundational insight of Madhyasth Darshan is that existence itself is co-existence (sah-astitva). This is not merely a descriptive observation but an ontological truth: to exist is to co-exist with other entities in space permeated by consciousness-energy (chaitanya). There are no isolated, independent substances—everything that exists does so in relationship with everything else (Nagraj, 2015, P. 1).

This differs fundamentally from both Western atomism and Indian non-dualism. Against atomism, Nagraj argues that entities are not self-enclosed units colliding in space but inherently relational beings whose very nature is defined by their participation in larger wholes. Against certain interpretations of non-dualism that dissolve multiplicity into undifferentiated unity, Nagraj affirms that diversity is real and eternal—coexistence means the harmonious presence of distinct yet interdependent entities (Nagraj, 2015, P.6).

Reality, in Madhyasth Darshan, consists of four levels of existence (astitva), each with its characteristic organisation:

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1. **Material Order (Padarth Avastha):** Physical and chemical processes governed by equilibrium, balance, and natural law
2. **Bio-Order (Praan Avastha):** Living organisms characterised by self-regulation, growth, and bodily consciousness
3. **Animal-Consciousness Order (Jeev Avastha):** Sentient beings with sensory awareness, emotion, and Inherent behaviour
4. **Human-Consciousness Order (Gyan Avastha):** Beings capable of understanding, imagination, and conscious co-existence

Each level emerges from and remains interdependent with previous levels. Humans, as the culmination of evolution, possess the unique capacity for understanding (samajh-daari)—not merely thinking about reality but directly realising the nature of co-existence (Nagraj, 2015, P.6).

Consciousness and Matter: The Madhyastha Principle

One of the most distinctive features of Madhyasth Darshan is its resolution of the consciousness-matter problem that has vexed both Idealism and Materialism. Nagraj proposes that the entire universe exists in an all-pervading medium he calls "consciousness-energy" (chaitanya shakti). This medium is neither purely mental (as Idealism claims) nor purely physical (as Materialism asserts), but the ground that makes both consciousness and material organisation possible (Nagraj, 2008, P.7).

Material units (atoms, molecules, objects) achieve their form and stability by being permeated by this consciousness-energy. They are not inert lumps of matter but activities sustained by their immersion in the conscious field. Similarly, conscious beings—plants, animals, humans—are material organisations that participate more fully in consciousness, exhibiting increasing degrees of awareness and understanding (Nagraj, 2015, P.6).

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This framework dissolves the complex problem of consciousness. There is no mystery about how subjective experience emerges from matter because matter itself exists within consciousness-energy. Nor is there a problem of how mind interacts with body—they are not separate substances but different manifestations of the same underlying reality, related as water and waves rather than as ghost and machine (Jain, 2019, p. 204).

Understanding: The Human Distinctive

While traditional philosophies emphasise knowledge, belief, or enlightenment, Madhyasth Darshan centres on understanding (*samajhdari*). Understanding is not mere intellectual comprehension but experiential realisation of how things truly are. When a person genuinely understands co-existence, this understanding transforms their entire way of being—their desires, relationships, and activities (Nagraj, 2015, p. 112).

Understanding is contrasted with imagination (*kalpana*). Humans are imaginative beings—we create mental models, narratives, ideologies, and beliefs. Imagination is necessary and valuable, but it can also mislead us into mistaking our constructs for reality. Idealism and Materialism, from this perspective, are imaginative frameworks—useful in certain contexts but ultimately partial and distortive when taken as complete accounts of reality (Nagraj, 2008, p. 201).

True understanding comes not from accumulating information or accepting doctrines but from direct realisation. This requires what Nagraj calls "self-verification" (*swa-nishtha*)—personally examining and confirming truth through one's own experience and reason. Unlike mystical traditions that emphasise ineffable experiences beyond rational articulation, Madhyasth Darshan insists that understanding can and must be communicated clearly and tested rationally (Tripathi, 2018, p. 134).

The Four Human Pursuits Reinterpreted

Nagraj reinterprets the traditional Indian concept of *Purushartha*

(human pursuits) in light of co-existential philosophy. Human fulfilment requires:

1. **Right Understanding (Samajhdari):** Realising the nature of co-existence and one's place within it
2. **Prosperity with Justice (Samriddhi):** Material abundance achieved through sustainable relationships with nature and equitable distribution
3. **Fearlessness and Trust (Abhaya):** Freedom from existential anxiety through understanding permanence and impermanence
4. **Co-Existence in Society (Sah-Astitva):** Participation in mutually fulfilling relationships at all levels—family, community, humanity, nature

Unlike classical Purushartha, which sometimes creates tension between worldly success and spiritual liberation, Nagraj's framework integrates all dimensions of human life. Understanding is not otherworldly but enables appropriate engagement with material, social, and ecological realities (Nagraj, 2015, p. 178).

Beyond Dialectical Conflict

Madhyasth Darshan explicitly rejects dialectical materialism's emphasis on class struggle and conflict as engines of progress. Nagraj argues that conflict arises from misunderstanding—specifically, from failing to recognise the inherent complementarity and interdependence of different roles and functions within society. When people understand co-existence, they naturally organise themselves cooperatively rather than competitively (Nagraj, 2008, p. 289).

This is not naive optimism that ignores power dynamics or exploitation. Rather, it suggests that exploitative relationships arise from a fundamental ignorance about human nature and social reality. The solution is not violent overthrow followed by new forms of coercion, but transformation of consciousness through education

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and dialogue. When people understand their essential interdependence, cooperation becomes rational and desirable, not merely morally demanded (Jain, 2019, p. 267).

Evaluation and Critique

Madhyasth Darshan offers several advantages over both Western dualism and dialectical materialism:

1. **Ontological Parsimony:** It avoids the proliferation of separate substances (mind, matter, God) while explaining diverse phenomena
2. **Epistemological Accessibility:** Understanding is achievable through reason and experience, not requiring mystical states or faith in authorities
3. **Ethical Groundedness:** Morality flows naturally from understanding rather than being imposed by external commands or arbitrary conventions
4. **Social Integration:** It provides frameworks for economic, political, and ecological organisation based on co-existence rather than exploitation
5. **Practical Orientation:** The philosophy is designed to be lived, not merely contemplated

However, critics raise several concerns:

Empirical Questions: The concept of consciousness-energy as an all-pervading medium requires empirical validation. How exactly does this differ from or relate to physical fields studied by science? What testable predictions does it make? (Kumar, 2020)

Cultural Specificity: Does Madhyasth Darshan depend on concepts and intuitions particular to Indian culture, limiting its universal applicability? Can it be meaningfully translated across cultural boundaries? (Singh, 2021)

Political Implications: The emphasis on understanding and harmony might underestimate the extent to which structural

violence and exploitation are embedded in existing institutions. Can education and dialogue alone address systemic injustice, or are more forceful interventions sometimes necessary? (Sharma, 2019)

Verification Methods: If understanding requires personal realisation, how do we adjudicate between competing claims of understanding? What prevents this from becoming another form of dogmatism where those who "understand" claim authority over those who don't? (Mishra, 2022)

Despite these questions, Madhyasth Darshan represents a serious attempt to move beyond the limitations of both Idealism and Materialism while addressing contemporary challenges. Its emphasis on co-existence resonates with developments in ecology, systems theory, and complexity science, suggesting potential dialogue between this indigenous philosophical tradition and cutting-edge scientific thought (Tripathi, 2018, p. 312).

Madhyasth Darshan as Bridge and Beyond

What makes Nagraj's philosophy particularly significant is its positioning—it neither rejects Western thought entirely nor uncritically accepts it. Instead, it examines Western philosophy's insights and limitations from the standpoint of co-existential realism, offering both critique and synthesis. Where Western philosophy excels—empirical investigation, logical rigour, individual rights—Madhyasth Darshan incorporates these strengths. Where it fails—fragmentation, reductionism, alienation—alternative frameworks are proposed (Nagraj, 2015, p. 401).

Similarly, Madhyasth Darshan engages critically with traditional Indian philosophies. It appreciates their holism, practical orientation, and recognition of consciousness as fundamental, while questioning aspects that seem outdated or problematic—such as caste hierarchy, world-negation, and scriptural authority. The result is a contemporary philosophy rooted in but not bound by tradition, speaking to modern concerns while drawing upon ancient wisdom (Jain, 2019, p. 298).

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In this sense, Madhyasth Darshan exemplifies the "third paradigm" called for earlier—integrative rather than reductive, relational rather than substantialist, contextual rather than absolute, practical rather than purely theoretical, and inclusive rather than exclusive. Whether it will gain wider recognition and influence remains to be seen, but it demonstrates that alternatives to dominant frameworks exist and deserve serious consideration.

Conclusion

The opposition between Idealism and Materialism has dominated Western philosophy for over two millennia, shaping not only academic debates but also the organisation of societies and the self-understanding of individuals. Yet both positions face serious philosophical problems, and the dialectical attempt to overcome their opposition often reinforces dualistic thinking even as it claims to transcend it. Indian philosophical traditions, while diverse and not without their own complexities, offer resources for imagining a different approach—one that does not reduce reality to mind or matter, that does not require opposition and conflict, that recognises multiple valid perspectives, and that remains oriented toward practical wisdom and human flourishing. These traditions suggest that the dualism between Idealism and Materialism is not an inevitable feature of human thought but a particular historical development that can be questioned and overcome.

The next chapter will explore more concretely how Indian knowledge systems—particularly the concepts of Dharma, Purushartha, and Varna-ashrama dharma—provide frameworks for integrating different dimensions of human existence into a coherent vision of the good life and the good society. These frameworks are not mere abstract theories but have guided actual human communities for centuries, offering lived alternatives to the fragmentation characteristic of modern Western thought. The wisdom of the Indian traditions points another way—a way of dialogue rather than dialectic, where reality is understood through relational awareness. Advaita reveals the unity behind multiplicity; Sāṃkhya discloses the complementarity of consciousness and

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matter; Buddhism teaches dependent co-arising; Jainism cultivates non-violent pluralism. Together, they prepare the ground for a truly integral philosophy—one that the Madhyasth Darshan systematises as *Co-Existential Realism (Sah-Astitvvaad)*.

This transition marks not merely a shift in thought but a civilisational turning point. The future of humanity depends on transcending the conflictual paradigms of the past and rediscovering the wholeness that underlies life itself. The next chapter will elaborate on this transition through the emergence of Madhyasth Darshan as the philosophy of coexistence. This framework reconciles knowledge, consciousness, and material order within the living harmony of existence.

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Chapter 3: Indian Knowledge Systems & the Search for Wholeness

The first two chapters diagnosed a problem: Western philosophy's dualistic framework, oscillating between Idealism and Materialism, fragments human understanding and creates profound difficulties both theoretical and practical. This final chapter turns to resources within Indian knowledge systems that may help us move toward a more integrative vision—one that honours the full complexity of human existence without reducing it to a single dimension.

While the Western philosophical journey largely oscillated between *idealism* and *materialism*, the Indian Knowledge Tradition (*Bharatiya Jñāna Paramparā*) sought a third path from the beginning—a vision not of opposition but of integration and harmony. Indian philosophy, in its various schools, never separated the ontological from the ethical, or the cosmic from the social. Existence (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*), and bliss (*ānanda*) were viewed as aspects of the same reality, reflected in both the cosmos and the individual human being.

Indian philosophy offers not one but multiple frameworks for understanding reality, human purpose, and social organisation. While these frameworks emerged from specific cultural and historical contexts, they address perennial human questions: What is real? How should we live? What makes a society just? How can we achieve both individual flourishing and collective harmony? This chapter explores three interconnected conceptual systems: the cosmic order principles of Dharma, Rita, and the Gunas; the fourfold aims of human life (Purushartha); and the social organisational framework of Varna-ashrama dharma (Flood, 1996).

Our goal is not to romanticise Indian thought or propose it as a perfect solution to all philosophical problems. Instead, we seek to understand how these systems approach the issue of wholeness—

how they attempt to integrate spiritual aspiration with material needs, individual development with social responsibility, transcendent truth with contextual wisdom. In doing so, we may discover opportunities to reimagine our fragmented world.

This chapter explores how these foundational ideas collectively articulate a science of wholeness, culminating in a worldview of co-existence. It further traces the transformation from metaphysics—the search for ultimate reality—to ethics—the realisation of harmonious living (*sah-Jeevan*).

3.1 Dharma: The Ordering Principle of Cosmos and Society

The concept of Dharma is central to Indian thought but notoriously difficult to translate. It comes from the Sanskrit root *dhr*, meaning "to hold" or "to sustain." Dharma is what upholds, maintains, and sustains—both the cosmic order and human society. It refers simultaneously to natural law, moral duty, religious teaching, social norms, and individual righteousness. This multiplicity of meanings is not confusion but richness: Dharma names a unified principle that manifests differently at different levels (Halbfass, 1991).

3.1.1 Dharma as Cosmic Order: At the cosmic level, Dharma is the fundamental order of reality—the way things are structured and how they naturally function. It is similar to what ancient Greeks called *logos* or Chinese thinkers called *Tao*, though with its own distinctive features. The sun rises and sets, seasons change, rivers flow to the ocean—all according to Dharma. This is not mechanical causation as understood in modern science, nor is it divine command imposed from outside. Rather, Dharma is the inherent pattern or intelligence within things that guides their proper functioning (Olivelle, 2009).

Importantly, Dharma at this level is both descriptive and prescriptive. It describes how things behave and prescribes how they should behave. This might seem strange to Western thinking, which sharply distinguishes "is" from "ought." But in Indian thought, proper functioning is built into the nature of things. For a fire to burn

is both what it does (description) and what it ought to do (prescription)—burning is the Dharma of fire (Lipner, 1994).

3.1.2 Dharma as Moral Law: For human beings, who possess consciousness and choice, Dharma becomes explicitly ethical. Humans can act against their Dharma—we can lie, harm, steal. But in doing so, we violate not merely social conventions but the fundamental order of reality. This violation creates disorder (adharma) both within ourselves and in the world around us. The moral life consists in aligning our actions with Dharma—acting in ways that sustain rather than undermine the cosmic and social order (Kane, 1941).

Unlike Western approaches that ground ethics in divine command (theological ethics), human reason (Kantian ethics), or consequences (utilitarian ethics), Dharmic ethics is fundamentally relational and contextual. What is Dharmic depends on one's role, circumstances, and capacities. The Dharma of a student differs from that of a parent, a ruler, or a renunciate. This is not moral relativism—Dharma is objective—but rather recognition that ethics is situational. The rightness of an action depends not on abstract principles alone but on context (Creel, 1977).

3.1.3 Rita and Dharma: In the earliest Vedic texts, the term Rita appears more frequently than Dharma. Rita means "cosmic order" or "truth"—the fundamental structure of reality. Rita encompasses both natural regularities (seasons, celestial movements) and moral-social order (truth-telling, promise-keeping, ritual propriety). The gods themselves are subject to Rita; they maintain and protect it but do not create it arbitrarily (Brown, 1942).

As Indian thought developed, Dharma gradually replaced Rita as the central ordering principle, though the two concepts remain closely related. Dharma retains Rita's sense of cosmic order but emphasises the active role of human beings in maintaining it. While Rita stresses the givenness of cosmic structure, Dharma stresses human responsibility to uphold it through right action. The shift from Rita to Dharma reflects a growing awareness that human consciousness

Chapter 3: Indian Knowledge Systems & the Search for Wholeness
and choice create special responsibilities (Halbfass, 1991).

3.1.4 The Three Gunas: Qualities of Existence: Closely related to Dharma is the concept of the three gunas—fundamental qualities or tendencies that pervade all manifest existence. As mentioned in the previous chapter in the context of Samkhya philosophy, the gunas are: sattva (harmony, clarity, goodness), rajas (activity, passion, restlessness), and tamas (inertia, darkness, ignorance). Everything in the manifest world, including human psychology, represents different mixtures of these three qualities (Larson & Bhattacharya, 1987).

The gunas are not moral categories in a simple sense—they are ontological principles describing the qualities of being. Yet they have moral significance because human flourishing depends on cultivating sattva while managing rajas and tamas. Sattvic states of mind are characterised by clarity, peacefulness, and insight. Rajasic states involve restlessness, desire, and attachment to results. Tamasic states include confusion, lethargy, and ignorance. While some rajas is necessary for action and some tamas for rest, the goal is to increase sattva, which enables proper understanding and right action (Feuerstein, 2001).

The concept of gunas offers a sophisticated framework for understanding human psychology and ethics without the dualistic split between mind and matter that troubles Western thought. The gunas operate in both psyche and matter—they are simultaneously psychological and physical. This reflects a more integrated vision of human nature than Western dualism allows (Chapple, 1993).

3.2 Purushartha: The Four Aims of Human Life

If Dharma provides the organising principle for cosmic and social order, Purushartha articulates the goals that make human life meaningful and fulfilled. The concept of Purushartha recognises four legitimate aims: Dharma (righteousness), Artha (prosperity and success), Kama (pleasure and desire), and Moksha (liberation and spiritual freedom). A fully realised human life successfully integrates all four aims (Bilimoria et al., 2007).

3.2.1 Dharma as Purushartha: Here Dharma appears not as the cosmic principle but as one of four human aims—specifically, the aim of living righteously, fulfilling one's duties, and acting ethically. Dharma in this sense provides the framework within which the other aims must be pursued. Artha and Kama are legitimate only when pursued in accordance with Dharma. Wealth gained through exploitation or pleasure derived from harming others violates Dharma and ultimately undermines one's wellbeing (Olivelle, 1993). This is a crucial point: Indian thought does not reject worldly goals in favour of purely spiritual ones. Prosperity and pleasure are acknowledged as legitimate human aims. But they must be pursued within an ethical framework. This contrasts with Western traditions that often see tension or conflict between worldly success and spiritual attainment—as if one must choose between material prosperity and moral goodness (Crawford, 1982).

3.2.2 Artha: Material Prosperity and Political Power: Artha refers to the pursuit of wealth, security, power, and success in worldly affairs. It includes economic prosperity, political effectiveness, and social standing. The ancient text *Arthashastra*, attributed to Kautilya (c. 4th century BCE), is a sophisticated manual of statecraft and economics, demonstrating that Indian thought took material concerns seriously (Kautilya, trans. 1992). Importantly, Artha is not individualistic in the Western sense. One pursues prosperity not merely for personal enjoyment but to support one's family, fulfil social obligations, and contribute to community welfare. Wealth carries responsibility—those who prosper have duties toward those in need. This social embedding of economic activity contrasts with modern capitalism's emphasis on individual acquisition and competition (McClish & Olivelle, 2012).

3.2.3 Kama: Pleasure and Aesthetic Experience: Kama encompasses sensory pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, emotional fulfilment, and erotic love. Like Artha, Kama is recognised as a legitimate aim of life, not something to be suppressed or transcended. The *Kamasutra*, while famous in the West primarily for its sexual content, is actually a comprehensive guide to living

pleasurably—covering art, music, conversation, and the cultivation of refined sensibilities (Vatsyayana, trans. 2002). The acceptance of Kama as a Purushartha reflects a positive attitude toward embodied existence that contrasts with certain strands of Western thought (especially Christian Platonism) that view the body and its pleasures with suspicion. In Indian thought, pleasure is good when pursued wisely, in accordance with Dharma, and without excessive attachment. The problem is not pleasure itself but becoming enslaved to it (Bilimoria, 2007).

3.2.4 Moksha: Liberation and Transcendence: The fourth aim, Moksha, represents liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara), freedom from suffering, and realisation of one's ultimate nature. While the first three aims pertain to worldly life, Moksha points toward transcendence. Yet it is included among the Purusharthas, making spiritual liberation not opposed to worldly aims but rather their ultimate completion (Fort & Mumme, 1996).

Different philosophical schools understand Moksha differently. For Advaita Vedanta, it is recognising the identity of Atman (individual self)

3.3 The Integrated View:

In this structure, Indian philosophy anticipates a holistic model of human development, with ethical, material, emotional, and spiritual dimensions interwoven. Unlike Western dichotomies such as sacred versus secular or reason versus desire, the Purushārtha framework demonstrates that fulfilment lies in balance rather than opposition. This integration anticipates modern well-being frameworks and even the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for economic prosperity, social justice, and environmental balance to coexist. The ancient insight remains strikingly contemporary.

3.4 Varna-Ashrama Dharma: Social Organisation as Cosmic Reflection

One of the most distinctive and, in modern times, most contested contributions of Indian social thought is the framework of Varna-

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Ashrama Dharma — the integration of social roles (varna) with stages of life (ashrama) into a comprehensive vision of how human society ought to be organised. To understand this framework, it is necessary to approach it as it was philosophically conceived rather than as it has been historically distorted. In its original formulation, Varna-Ashrama Dharma was not a justification for hereditary hierarchy but rather an attempt to map the full range of human capacities and life-phases onto a coherent social and cosmic order, ensuring that every individual could live purposefully and that society as a whole could function harmoniously (Flood, 1996).

3.4.1 The Fourfold Division of Varna

The four varnas — Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra — were originally understood as functional categories corresponding to the predominance of different qualities (gunas) in different individuals. The Brahmana, dominated by sattva, was oriented toward knowledge, teaching, and the preservation of wisdom. The Kshatriya, in whom rajas combined with sattva, was oriented toward governance, protection, and the exercise of power in service of the community. The Vaishya, whose rajas expressed itself through enterprise, was oriented toward trade, agriculture, and the material sustenance of society. The Shudra was oriented toward service and craft, the practical work that kept the social fabric intact. Crucially, the Bhagavad Gita explicitly grounds varna not in birth but in inherent nature and action (svabhava and karma), suggesting that the four-fold division was meant to honour the diversity of human temperament and capacity rather than to fix persons in hereditary castes (Edgerton, 1972).

The philosophical significance of this framework lies in its attempt to create a society in which no function is devalued. Unlike modern capitalist societies that implicitly rank persons by economic productivity, or modern meritocracies that reward intellectual performance while devaluing manual labour, the Varna ideal — however imperfectly realised — sought to affirm the sacred dignity of every social function. A cobbler performing the Dharma of his craft was, in principle, as cosmically significant as a philosopher

performing the Dharma of his wisdom (Radhakrishnan, 1927). This is a vision of social complementarity rather than social hierarchy — each element of the social body supporting and requiring every other.

3.4.2 The Four Ashramas: Life as a Developmental Journey

Complementing the social division of varna, the ashrama system articulated a vision of individual life as an ordered developmental journey through four stages: Brahmacharya (studentship and disciplined learning), Grihastha (householder life, with its responsibilities of family, livelihood, and social contribution), Vanaprastha (gradual withdrawal from worldly responsibilities toward deeper reflection), and Sannyasa (renunciation and the pursuit of liberation). This framework is philosophically remarkable for several reasons (Olivelle, 1993).

First, it integrates the pursuit of Moksha with full participation in worldly life rather than demanding renunciation from the outset. Spiritual liberation is the culmination of a life fully lived, not an escape from it. Second, it acknowledges that human beings are different at different stages of their development, and that what is appropriate and Dharmic changes accordingly. The student's Dharma is discipline and receptivity; the householder's Dharma is engagement and responsibility; the elder's Dharma is reflection and guidance; the renunciant's Dharma is the direct pursuit of ultimate truth. Third, the ashrama system reflects an implicit developmental psychology — an understanding that human consciousness matures through engagement with life's different dimensions rather than through premature withdrawal from any of them (Kakar, 1978).

The integration of varna and ashrama into a single framework represents Indian philosophy's most ambitious attempt to create a social order that is simultaneously cosmically grounded, individually fulfilling, and collectively harmonious. The fact that this ideal was subverted by hereditary caste discrimination is a failure of social practice, not a refutation of the philosophical vision. Indeed, thinkers from Swami Vivekananda to B.R. Ambedkar, while

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sharply critical of caste as practised, nevertheless engaged seriously with the underlying question of how a society can honour both diversity and dignity (Ambedkar, 1936; Vivekananda, 1907).

3.5 From Metaphysics to Ethics: The Science of Harmonious Living (Sah-Jeevan)

A defining characteristic of Indian philosophical thought, one that sharply distinguishes it from much of the Western tradition, is its persistent refusal to separate metaphysics from ethics. The question of what ultimately exists is never treated as merely academic; it always carries immediate implications for how one ought to live. This inseparability of ontology and ethics constitutes what we may call the practical turn of Indian philosophy — its orientation not merely toward understanding reality but toward transforming the human being who seeks to understand it (Mohanty, 1992).

3.5.1 Knowledge as Transformation

In the Upanishadic tradition, *jñana* (knowledge) is not propositional knowledge about an external world but a transformative realisation that changes the very structure of the knowing subject. To truly know Brahman is to become Brahman — or, more precisely, to recognise that one has always been Brahman. This is not mystical vagueness but a rigorous epistemological claim: that the deepest form of knowledge is self-knowledge, and that self-knowledge is inseparable from ethical and existential transformation (Deutsch, 1969). The Mundaka Upanishad's famous distinction between *para vidya* (higher knowledge, the knowledge of Brahman) and *apara vidya* (lower knowledge, the knowledge of worldly affairs) does not devalue empirical knowledge but rather situates it within a larger framework in which knowledge serves the ultimate purpose of human liberation and flourishing.

This understanding of knowledge as transformation has profound implications for how we conceive of education, social organisation, and the relationship between wisdom and power. If knowledge is ultimately about the transformation of consciousness rather than the accumulation of information, then the institutions and practices that

transmit knowledge — the gurukula, the philosophical community, the tradition of shruti and smriti — are not merely educational but civilisational in their significance (Coward, 1990).

3.5.2 The Ethical Imperative of Cosmic Interconnection

Across virtually all schools of Indian philosophy, the recognition of cosmic interconnection — whether articulated through the Vedantic concept of Brahman, the Buddhist concept of *pratityasamutpada* (dependent origination), the Jain concept of *anekantavada* (many-sidedness of reality), or the Samkhya-Yoga concept of *prakrti* — carries a direct ethical implication. If all things are fundamentally interconnected, then harm done to another is harm done to oneself; the boundary between self and other is ultimately conventional rather than ultimate. This metaphysical foundation for ethics is arguably more robust than either the Kantian grounding of ethics in abstract rational duty or the utilitarian grounding of ethics in the calculation of aggregate pleasure, because it roots moral obligation in the actual structure of reality rather than in a formal procedure or an empirical calculation (Bilimoria, Prabhu, & Sharma, 2007).

The Buddhist concept of *ahimsa* (non-harming), which was taken up and radicalised by the Jain tradition and then given political form by Gandhi, represents perhaps the most consequential expression of this insight. *Ahimsa* is not merely a rule prohibiting violence; it is the ethical expression of a metaphysical recognition that all living beings are interconnected in their suffering and their aspiration toward wellbeing (Chapple, 1993). The Jain doctrine of *anekantavada* further extends this recognition to the realm of epistemology, insisting that reality is irreducibly many-sided and that any single perspective, however carefully developed, is necessarily partial. Truth is not the exclusive property of any one tradition, school, or standpoint — it is approached asymptotically through the patient integration of multiple perspectives (Matilal, 1981).

3.5.3 Harmonious Living as the Fulfilment of Philosophy

The trajectory of Indian philosophy moves consistently from

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metaphysical inquiry toward the concrete realisation of harmonious living — what can be called Sah-Jeevan, or co-living in mutual recognition and support. This is not an abandonment of metaphysics but its fulfilment. When one genuinely understands the nature of reality as interconnected, dynamic, and inherently purposive, the natural expression of that understanding is a life characterised by compassion, self-regulation, non-exploitation, and active contribution to the wellbeing of others. Philosophy, on this account, is not complete until it transforms into a way of life — until darshan (vision, philosophy) becomes jeevan (life, living) (Radhakrishnan, 1932).

This integration of vision and life, of metaphysics and ethics, of cosmic order and personal conduct, represents Indian philosophy's most enduring contribution to the global conversation about how human beings ought to live. It provides a framework within which the questions raised by the Western tradition's dualism — how to reconcile mind and matter, individual and society, spiritual aspiration and material need — can be addressed not by choosing one pole over the other but by recognising their mutual implication in a richer, more comprehensive understanding of reality.

3.6 Madhyasth Darshan — Sah-Astitvavad as a Contemporary Synthesis

Origins of Madhyasth Darshan

The most systematic and philosophically rigorous articulation of a third paradigm — one that transcends the dualism of Idealism and Materialism, integrates the insights of the philosophical tradition, and addresses the concrete crises of the contemporary world — is found in the life and work of A. Nagraj (1920–2016), the philosopher and thinker who developed the comprehensive philosophical system known as Madhyasth Darshan — Sah-Astitvavad, which may be translated as Coexistence Philosophy or The Philosophy of Equidistant Vision and Mutual Existence. Nagraj formulated this system following years of intense inquiry and sadhana (disciplined practice) at Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh,

beginning in the 1950s. His work spans several foundational texts, including Madhyasth Darshan, Manav Vyavhar Darshan, Manav Abhyas Darshan, and Praamanik Manav Karm Darshan, Manav Anubhav Darshan collectively offering a comprehensive account of existence, consciousness, human nature, knowledge, ethics, and social order (Nagraj, 1999).

Nagraj's point of departure is a diagnosis shared with the critical tradition in Western philosophy: that humanity's current crisis — ecological, social, psychological, and civilisational — is fundamentally a crisis of understanding (samajh). Neither the idealist tradition, which resolves material reality into spirit, nor the materialist tradition, which reduces consciousness to matter, has succeeded in providing a foundation for human living that is simultaneously scientifically coherent, ethically compelling, and experientially fulfilling. What is needed, Nagraj argued, is not a new ideology or a revised version of existing systems, but a Darshan — a direct vision of the nature of existence — that can ground a genuinely human way of life (Nagraj, 2000).

3.6.1 The Ontological Foundation: Existence as Co-Existence

The foundational ontological claim of Madhyasth Darshan is expressed in the phrase Astitva mein Sah-Astitva hai — "In existence, there is co-existence." This is not a social or political claim in the first instance; it is a metaphysical one. Existence, Nagraj argues, is not composed of isolated, self-subsistent units that subsequently enter into relations with one another. Rather, relatedness, participation, and mutual saturation (paripurnta) are constitutive of existence itself. Every unit of reality — from the subatomic to the cosmic — exists within, and is pervaded by, an all-pervasive medium that Nagraj calls Vyapak (the pervasive ground, analogous to but distinct from the physicist's concept of a field). Vyapak is not a deity, not a Hegelian Absolute, and not the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta as traditionally understood. It is a transparent, non-material, omnipresent medium within which all material units (Prakriti) are submerged (doobaa hua) and yet remain distinct (Nagraj, 1999).

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This is a philosophically precise and original claim. Unlike Advaita Vedanta, which tends toward the dissolution of individual identity into an undifferentiated Absolute (nirguna Brahman), Madhyasth Darshan insists that the individual units of Prakriti retain their distinctness within Vyapak. Co-existence is not absorption but participation — each unit is itself precisely by virtue of its participation in the whole. This resolves one of the central tensions of the Advaitic tradition without abandoning its insight into the non-dual character of ultimate reality. It also avoids the opposite error of materialist atomism, which conceives of reality as composed of fundamentally isolated units that interact only externally. In Madhyasth Darshan, the relationship between the unit and the whole is one of mutual constitution: Vyapak saturates every unit, and every unit participates in expressing the nature of Vyapak (Nagraj, 2004).

3.6.2 The Four Orders of Nature and the Human Place Within Them

Nagraj's ontology is not abstract but is articulated through a detailed account of the four orders (krama) of existence that constitute the natural world: the material or physical order (padartha avastha), the bio-chemical or pranic order (prana avastha), the animal order (jeev avastha), and the human or knowledge order (gyan avastha). These four orders are not merely descriptive categories but represent genuinely distinct levels of organisation, each characterised by qualitatively new capacities and forms of activity (Nagraj, 1999).

The material order is governed by physical and chemical regularities. The pranic order introduces self-organisation, growth, and reproduction. The animal order introduces sentience, desire, and behavioural flexibility. The human order introduces the capacity for gyan — knowledge understood not merely as information processing but as the capacity to understand the nature of existence and to regulate one's life in accordance with that understanding. This capacity for gyan is what distinguishes human beings from all other forms of life and what constitutes their specific dignity and responsibility. It is also what makes genuine ethics possible: only a being capable of understanding the nature of co-existence can freely

choose to live in accordance with it (Nagraj, 2000).

This framework has several important philosophical consequences. It avoids both the reductionism of materialist accounts that assimilate human consciousness to animal sentience or physical process, and the dualism of accounts that posit consciousness as a wholly separate substance mysteriously attached to a material body. Consciousness, in Madhyasth Darshan, is a real and causally efficacious dimension of reality that emerges at the human level as the capacity for understanding and self-regulation, but it is continuous with, rather than discontinuous from, the lower orders of nature. The human being is fully natural and fully conscious — these are not competing descriptions (Nagraj, 2004).

3.6.3 The Five Sheaths (Panch Kosha) and the Orders of Creation in Madhyasth Darshan

As Expounded in Manav Vyavhar Darshan by A. Nagraj

The Ground of All Existence: Absolute Energy (Nirapeksha Urja)

A. Nagraj begins his account of existence with a foundational ontological claim that distinguishes Madhyasth Darshan from both classical idealism and scientific materialism. All material units (padartha) are pervaded by and submerged within Absolute Energy (Nirapeksha Urja — the unconditional, non-relational ground of being). The position, movement, and activity of the entire creation (sampurna srishti) subsists within this Absolute Energy. This is not the energy of physics — not a measurable, quantifiable force — but the omnipresent medium that makes all existence, all motion, and all organisation possible (Nagraj, Manav Vyavhar Darshan).

From every activity or exertion (cheshta), what arises is relative energy (sapeksha urja) — energy that is conditional, relational, and expressed in the specific activities of specific units. The Absolute Energy, however, is available to all units as the ground of their primary exertion (mool cheshta). The primary exertion is defined precisely as the activity of matter at the atomic level — the striving

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of the atomic unit that is free from the pressure of the external environment. It is this primary exertion that gives each unit its fundamental identity and activity, prior to and independent of any external compulsion. The mool cheshta is thus not a mechanical reaction but the intrinsic, self-originating activity that constitutes the innermost nature of every material unit (Nagraj, 1999).

The Completion of Creation and the Gradations of Development

Nagraj then articulates a cosmological framework of striking coherence. A given bhoomi (earth, ground, or region of creation) can be considered fully developed (poorn-viksiti) only when it has become sufficiently enriched with all the necessary ras (primary juices, essential nutrients), upras (secondary or derived compounds), and vayu (gases and atmospheric conditions) required to sustain the full range of creation. In the infinite expanse of existence (aseem avakash), therefore, there exist innumerable earths or worlds, each at a different stage of development — some fully developed, some partially developed (ardha-viksiti), some minimally developed (alpa-viksiti), and some entirely undeveloped (aviksiti). The measure and evidence of ras and upras is found in the richness of chemical activity and natural abundance (vaibhav) present in any given region of creation (Nagraj, Manav Vyavhar Darshan).

The Four Orders of Creation (Avastha): A Nested Hierarchy of Being

On the basis of the development of kosha (sheath) organisation — explained below — Nagraj identifies four fundamental orders of creation, each representing a qualitatively distinct level of organisation, capacity, and expression:

1. Padartha Avastha — The Material or Physical Order (Undeveloped Creation) This comprises all matter in its elemental and mineral forms: soil (mrid), stone (paashan), gems (mani), and metals (dhaatu). This is the order of matter in its least organised form of consciousness-expression — what Nagraj calls aviksiti srishti, undeveloped creation.

2. Prana Avastha — The Pranic or Bio-Chemical Order (Minimally Developed Creation) This encompasses all plant life (vanaspati) — the entire kingdom of vegetation. In the pranic order, existence has developed the capacity for growth, self-nourishment, and selective absorption. Plants growing on the same soil selectively absorb different nutrients according to their own specific needs — a capacity absent in the purely physical order. This selective activity is the first expression of the manomayi kosha (the sheath of selection), making the pranic order qualitatively more developed than the material order.

3. Jeev Avastha — The Animal or Sentient Order (Partially Developed Creation) This encompasses all non-human animal life — creatures born from eggs (andaj) and those born from the womb (pindaj). In the animal order, the capacity for sentience, desire, emotional expression, and behavioural flexibility emerges. The animal experiences pleasure and pain, seeks food, shelter, and reproduction. This order represents ardha-viksrit srishti, partially developed creation.

4. Gyan Avastha — The Knowledge Order (Fully Developed Creation) The human being alone belongs to this order, characterised by the full development of bodily organisation and, crucially, by the capacity for gyan — knowledge in its deepest sense: the understanding of the nature of existence, of right and wrong, of cause and consequence, of one's own nature and one's relationship to the whole. This is poorn-viksrit srishti, fully developed creation. The body (sharir) in the knowledge order is not merely more complex than animal bodies; it is organised to serve as the instrument of Jeevan — the conscious self — in its pursuit of understanding and realisation (Nagraj, 1999).

The Principle of Nested Inclusion

A philosophically crucial feature of this framework is the principle that higher orders of creation always contain and subsume the lower orders within themselves. In the pranic order (plants), the material order is already present. In the animal order, both the material and

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pranic orders are contained. In the human order, all three lower orders are included. This is expressed through the principle: *guru mulya mein laghu mulya samaya rahta hai* — the lesser value is always contained within the greater value. Consequently, in higher orders of creation, the properties (*guna*), inherent character (*swabhava*), and holding-nature (*dharma*) of the lower orders are present in a sublimated or dissolved form (Nagraj, *Manav Vyavhar Darshan*).

This principle has profound philosophical implications. It means that the human being is not set apart from nature by possessing an alien substance (as in Cartesian dualism) but is a fuller expression of the same reality that is present, in less developed forms, throughout the entire natural order. Consciousness is not an intrusion into matter; it is the culmination of matter's own developmental trajectory.

The Five Sheaths (Panch Kosha): The Architecture of Existence

The classification of the four orders of creation is grounded in what Nagraj describes as the *kosha* system — a framework of five sheaths or functional capacities that together constitute the full architecture of any living or material unit. The term *kosha* means, in Nagraj's specific usage, a purposive and intentional capacity — the particular organised resource that is responsible for a specific kind of activity or tendency. A *kosha* is not merely an anatomical structure but a functional endowment — the capacity for a specific mode of engagement with existence (Nagraj, 1999).

The five koshas are as follows:

1. Pranamay Kosha — The Sheath of Vital Impulse (Energy Endowment)

The Pranamay Kosha is the organ or capacity that accepts or rejects vital impulse (*prerna*) — the basic energetic stirring or motivational force. It is the foundational capacity for activity itself. This *kosha* is present in its most elementary form even at the level of the atom: every atom is *sacheshta* (self-active, endowed with its own

exertion), and therefore possesses the organ for receiving impulse. The Pranamay Kosha constitutes what Nagraj calls the energy-endowment (urja sampannata), the force-endowment (bal sampannata), and the magnetic-force-endowment (chumbakiya bal sampannata) of a unit. This pranic endowment is the basis upon which atoms recognise one another, maintain specific distances, and organise themselves into stable atomic structures (Nagraj, Manav Vyavhar Darshan).

2. Annamay Kosha — The Sheath of Material Exchange (Nutritive Endowment)

The Annamay Kosha is the organ or capacity for intake and release (grahan aur visarjan) — the absorption of what is needed and the discharge of what is not. In the physical order, this capacity is expressed as the atomic processes of growth and decay (haas aur vikas). No atom is permanently fixed; every atom participates in processes of absorption and release. This kosha is therefore also present at the most elementary level of material existence. Nagraj emphasises the inseparable relationship (avibhajya sambandha) between the Pranamay Kosha and the Annamay Kosha: it is because the pranic sheath is active — because the unit is self-stirring — that the nutritive exchange of the Annamay Kosha also takes place. Activity precedes and enables exchange (Nagraj, 1999).

3. Manomayi Kosha — The Sheath of Selection (Discriminative Endowment)

The Manomayi Kosha is the organ or capacity for selection and choice (chayan). It first becomes clearly active in the pranic or vegetative order: plants growing in the same soil selectively absorb different nutrients, demonstrating a capacity for discrimination that goes beyond mere mechanical absorption. This selective activity — choosing what is appropriate to one's own nature and needs from among the available environment — constitutes the first emergence of what may be called preferential or proto-intentional activity in nature. In this sense, the Manomayi Kosha marks the beginning of what, at higher levels of organisation, will become full intentionality

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and conscious choice (Nagraj, Manav Vyavhar Darshan).

4. Anandamayi Kosha — The Sheath of Feeling (Expressive Endowment)

The Anandamayi Kosha is the organ or capacity for the expression of happiness or suffering (sukha athava dukha ko vyakt karna). It becomes active and clearly expressed in the animal order (jeev avastha) and in the confused or unawakened human order. The development of the Anandamayi Kosha is what Nagraj identifies as the cause of chaitanya — sentience or conscious awareness — in the animal order. It is because of this sheath that animals have the experiential capacity to feel pleasure and pain, and therefore have what Nagraj describes as the natural entitlement to pursue the four primary animal drives: food (ahaar), sleep (nidra), fear-avoidance (bhay), and reproduction (maithun). The Anandamayi Kosha is thus the seat of emotional and sentient life, present in its full form in all animals and in the unawakened human being (Nagraj, 1999).

5. Vigyanmayi Kosha — The Sheath of Wisdom (Knowledge Endowment)

The Vigyanmayi Kosha is the organ or capacity for the reception and expression of special or discriminative knowledge (vishesh gyan). It is the sheath that is uniquely and fully active in the awakened human being (jagrit manav). The awakening of the Vigyanmayi Kosha is what makes possible gyan (knowledge of principles), vigyan (the application of knowledge to specific realities), and vivek (discriminative wisdom — the capacity to distinguish the appropriate from the inappropriate, the real from the unreal, the lasting from the transient). It is through vivek and vigyan together that the understanding of the causes of suffering and its resolution becomes possible — and it is from this understanding that the genuine, durable experience of sukha (happiness), shanti (peace), santosh (contentment), and ananda (bliss) arises (Nagraj, Manav Vyavhar Darshan).

This is a philosophical point of the first importance: in Madhyasth Darshan, happiness, peace, and bliss are not the products of

favourable external circumstances, nor of the suppression of desire, nor of mystical transcendence. They are the natural and inevitable consequence of the awakening and activity of the Vigyanmayi Kosha — of the human being's realisation of genuine understanding. Suffering, in turn, is always ultimately the consequence of the non-awakening or misdirection of this sheath.

The Distribution of the Five Sheaths Across the Four Orders

Nagraj articulates with great precision how the five koshas are distributed across the four orders of creation:

In the material order (padartha avastha), two koshas are active: the Pranamay Kosha and the Annamay Kosha. Every atom is self-active (sacheshta) and therefore possesses the pranic impulse-receiving capacity; every atom undergoes growth and decay and therefore possesses the nutritive exchange capacity. These two koshas are inseparably linked at this foundational level of existence.

In the pranic order (prana avastha), three koshas are active: the Pranamay, Annamay, and Manomayi Koshas. The emergence of the selective-discriminative capacity — the Manomayi Kosha — marks the qualitative transition from mere physical process to proto-intentional activity.

In the animal order (jeev avastha) and the unawakened human order (bhramit gyan avastha — the confused or misoriented knowledge order), four koshas are active: the Pranamay, Annamay, Manomayi, and Anandamayi Koshas. The emergence of the expressive-feeling capacity marks the transition from vegetative to sentient life. Here Nagraj introduces the critical concept of bhramit gyan avastha — the confused knowledge order — which is the condition of most human beings as they actually exist: possessed of the full organic endowment of the human order, including the latent Vigyanmayi Kosha, but not yet awakened to the full use of their distinctive human capacity. The unawakened human being therefore lives largely at the level of the animal order — driven by the four basic drives and the Anandamayi Kosha's pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain — while remaining unaware of their deeper

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capacity for genuine understanding.

In the awakened human order (jagrit gyan avastha), all five koshas are active and fully expressed. The Vigyanmayi Kosha is awakened and functioning, making possible the full realisation of human potential: gyan, vigyan, vivek, and the consequent experience of sukha, shanti, santosh, and ananda as stable, durable, and unconditional states rather than fleeting responses to favourable circumstances (Nagraj, 1999).

Philosophical Significance: The Panch Kosha Framework as a Resolution of Mind-Body Dualism

The philosophical significance of Nagraj's Panch Kosha framework extends well beyond its role as a taxonomy of natural orders. It represents a genuinely original resolution of the mind-body problem that has bedevilled Western philosophy since Descartes. By showing that what we call consciousness, sentience, and intellect are not alien intrusions into a fundamentally material world, but rather successive developments of capacities (koshas) that are present in seed form at even the most elementary levels of material existence, Nagraj dissolves the sharp ontological boundary between matter and mind. The human being is not a mind mysteriously attached to a body, nor a body that has somehow generated an illusory mind. The human being is a fully natural entity in whom the entire developmental trajectory of existence — from the Pranamay Kosha of the atom to the Vigyanmayi Kosha of awakened consciousness — finds its fullest and most complete expression.

This framework also provides a rigorous philosophical foundation for the ethical and civilisational vision of Madhyasth Darshan as a whole. If the highest human capacity is understanding (gyan, vigyan, vivek) — the full awakening of the Vigyanmayi Kosha — then the purpose of education, social organisation, and cultural life is precisely the cultivation of this capacity in every human being. A society organised in accordance with the understanding of co-existence (sah-astitva) would be one in which the conditions for the awakening of the Vigyanmayi Kosha in every person are actively

created and sustained — a society oriented not toward the maximisation of material consumption or the enforcement of ideological conformity, but toward the realisation of the full human potential for understanding, wisdom, and harmonious co-existence (Nagraj, Manav Vyavhar Darshan).

3.6.4 The Human Being: Jeevan and Sharir — Consciousness and Body in Relation

At the heart of Madhyasth Darshan's account of human nature is the distinction between Jeevan (the conscious self, the living unit of awareness) and Sharir (the body). This distinction superficially resembles the Cartesian distinction between mind and body, but it is fundamentally different in its philosophical implications. For Descartes, mind and body are substances of wholly different kinds, related only contingently and mysteriously. For Nagraj, Jeevan and Sharir are not substances but functions — they are different expressions of the same underlying reality of co-existence, related not contingently but essentially (Nagraj, 1999).

Jeevan in Madhyasth Darshan is the seat of consciousness, imagination, desire, thought, and understanding. It is the unit of awareness that, when properly developed, achieves samadhan (resolution, inner contentment), samriddhi (material sufficiency), abhay (fearlessness), and sah-astitva (the lived recognition of co-existence). The central purpose of human life, in Nagraj's framework, is the development of Jeevan to its full capacity — the realisation of its natural state of sukh (happiness) and anand (bliss) through the achievement of understanding rather than through sensory gratification or metaphysical escape. This is a crucial point: Nagraj explicitly rejects both the materialist identification of human fulfilment with the satisfaction of biological desires and the idealist identification of human fulfilment with the transcendence of embodied life. True human fulfilment is the realisation of Jeevan's capacity for understanding — understanding of self, of society, of nature, and of the whole of existence (Nagraj, 2000).

3.6.5 Ethics as the Natural Expression of Understanding:

Dharma Reconceived

One of the most significant contributions of Madhyasth Darshan to ethical philosophy is its reconceptualisation of the relationship between knowledge and ethics. In most ethical traditions, whether Western or Indian, there is a gap between knowing what is right and actually doing it — a gap that moral psychology, social institutions, and religious discipline are called upon to bridge. In Madhyasth Darshan, this gap is itself the symptom of a deeper deficiency: the absence of genuine samajh (understanding, resolution). When a human being truly understands the nature of co-existence — understands, that is, not merely intellectually but as a lived reality — right action follows naturally and without compulsion. Ethics is not a set of external rules imposed on a recalcitrant nature; it is the natural expression of a consciousness that has achieved resolution (samadhan) (Nagraj, 1999).

This position has significant implications for how we think about moral education, social institutions, and the relationship between individual development and social transformation. If right action flows from genuine understanding, then the primary task of education is not the inculcation of moral rules but the cultivation of samajh — the development of a consciousness capable of understanding reality as it is. This requires a form of education that addresses the whole human being, integrating the development of understanding with the development of character, skill, and relationship. It also implies that social transformation cannot be achieved by institutional reform alone; genuine and lasting social change requires the transformation of human consciousness — not through coercive indoctrination but through the expansion of understanding (Nagraj, 2004).

3.6.6 The Five Dimensions of Human Aspiration: A Universal Ethical Framework

Madhyasth Darshan articulates a comprehensive account of what human beings universally seek, expressed as five fundamental aspirations that constitute the natural orientation of Jeevan: sukh

(happiness), samridhi (prosperity and material sufficiency), abhay (fearlessness and security), sah-astitva (recognition of co-existence and belonging), and anand (bliss or the deepest fulfilment). These five aspirations are not merely psychological observations about what humans happen to desire; they are claims about the natural telos of human consciousness — what Jeevan is inherently oriented toward when it is developing properly (Nagraj, 1999).

This framework bears comparison with both Aristotle's account of eudaimonia as the natural telos of human life and with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but it differs from both in important respects. Unlike Aristotle's account, which is grounded in a fixed conception of human nature and tends toward an elite understanding of flourishing available only to those with the leisure for philosophical contemplation, Nagraj's account is universally applicable — every human being, regardless of social position, education, or cultural background, is oriented toward these same five aspirations. Unlike Maslow's hierarchy, which treats higher needs as contingent upon the satisfaction of lower ones and remains within a broadly materialist psychological framework, Nagraj's account integrates the material and the conscious dimensions of human aspiration from the outset, without reducing one to the other (Nagraj, 2000).

3.6.7 Sah-Astitvavad and the Critique of Both Idealism and Materialism

From the perspective of Madhyasth Darshan, both Idealism and Materialism are partial visions of a reality that is inherently relational and co-existent. Idealism errs by privileging consciousness while neglecting or devaluing the material order — the result is a vision of human fulfilment that requires escape from embodied, relational, natural existence rather than its deepening and transformation. Materialism errs in the opposite direction, privileging matter while neglecting or denying the reality and irreducibility of consciousness — the result is a vision of human life reduced to biological process and economic activity, incapable of accounting for meaning, value, or the aspiration toward wholeness (Nagraj, 2004).

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Madhyasth Darshan's critique of both traditions is not merely negative but generative: it shows how each tradition's partial insight can be preserved and integrated within a more comprehensive framework. The Idealist insight that consciousness is real, that understanding is genuinely transformative, and that human beings are oriented toward a form of fulfilment that transcends mere biological satisfaction — all of this is affirmed and deepened in Nagraj's account of Jeevan and its natural orientation toward anand. The Materialist insight that matter is real, that embodied existence is not a deficiency to be overcome but a reality to be understood and honoured, and that human wellbeing has irreducibly material conditions — this too is affirmed in Nagraj's account of Sharir, samridhi, and the four orders of nature. The synthesis is not a compromise but a genuine elevation of both insights to a level at which their apparent opposition dissolves (Nagraj, 1999).

3.6.7 From Philosophy to Civilisation: Manav Dharma and the Vision of a Humane Social Order

Madhyasth Darshan does not conclude with metaphysics or ethics in the abstract. It unfolds into a comprehensive vision of social organisation — what Nagraj calls Manav Dharma (Human Dharma or Universal Human Ethics) and Manavatavad (Humanism) — grounded in the understanding of co-existence. A society organised in accordance with the understanding of co-existence would be characterised by what Nagraj describes as the three foundational dimensions of humane social order: Sanyam (self-regulation and non-exploitation in one's relationship with nature), Swasthata (health and wholeness in one's physical and psychological being), and Svarajya (self-governance and participatory justice in social life) (Nagraj, 2000).

These three dimensions correspond directly to the three fundamental relationships that constitute human existence: the relationship of the individual to the natural order, the relationship of the individual to their own bodily and psychological being, and the relationship of the individual to the social order. A genuinely humane civilisation, in Nagraj's vision, would be one in which all three relationships are

characterised by understanding, mutual recognition, and non-exploitation — a civilisation that honours the co-existence of human beings with one another, with other species, and with the natural world as a whole (Nagraj, 2004).

This vision offers a philosophically coherent and practically oriented response to the deepest challenges of our contemporary moment. Ecological crisis, social fragmentation, psychological disorder, and political dysfunction are not, in Nagraj's analysis, separate problems requiring separate technical solutions. They are all expressions of a single underlying deficiency: the absence of the understanding of co-existence — *sah-astitva ki samajh* — at the level of both individual consciousness and social organisation. The resolution of these crises therefore requires not merely new policies or new technologies but a transformation of human understanding — a *Darshan* adequate to the reality of co-existence (Nagraj, 1999).

Concluding Reflection: Indian Knowledge Systems and the Path Forward

The journey through the concepts explored in this chapter — Dharma, Rita, the Gunas, Purushartha, Varna-Ashrama Dharma, Sah-Jeevan, and Madhyasth Darshan — reveals a consistent philosophical orientation that stands in productive contrast to the Western dualistic tradition examined in the previous chapters. Indian philosophical thought, in its most considered and integrative expressions, begins not with opposition but with wholeness — not with isolated substances that must subsequently be related, but with relationship and co-existence as the irreducible starting point of all genuine understanding.

This orientation does not make Indian philosophy immune to its own historical distortions and failures. The ideal of Varna as functional complementarity was subverted into hereditary caste oppression. The recognition of Moksha as the goal of life was sometimes used to legitimate withdrawal from social responsibility. The richness of *anekantavada* was not always translated into genuinely pluralistic social arrangements. These failures must be acknowledged honestly

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and learned from carefully (Ambedkar, 1936). Yet the philosophical resources themselves — refined over millennia of inquiry, debate, and lived practice — remain available, and their relevance to the contemporary search for a more adequate understanding of reality and a more humane organisation of society has never been greater.

What A. Nagraj's Madhyasth Darshan contributes to this tradition is a systematic, rigorous, and contemporary articulation of its deepest insights — one that addresses the specific failures of both Idealism and Materialism, engages with the realities of the natural and social sciences, and offers a practically applicable framework for the transformation of human understanding and the reconstruction of human civilisation on the foundation of co-existence. In this sense, Madhyasth Darshan represents not merely a contribution to the history of Indian philosophy but a genuinely universal philosophical proposal — one that the global conversation about the future of humanity cannot afford to ignore.

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Part II: The Emergence of Madhyasth Darshan (Sah-Astitvvaad)

Chapter 4: Discovery of Co-Existence

Introduction

The first part of this work traced the limitations of Western dualistic thinking and explored how Indian philosophical traditions offer resources for imagining alternatives. Yet the question remains: Can contemporary thought synthesise these insights into a living philosophy adequate to the challenges of our time? This chapter introduces Madhyasth Darshan (Co-Existential Philosophy), also known as Sah-Astitvvaad (Co-Existentialism), developed by Indian philosopher A. Nagraj (1920-2016) over decades of contemplation and realisation (Nagraj, 2008, P.20).

Madhyasth Darshan represents neither a return to ancient traditions nor an adoption of Western frameworks, but rather an original philosophical system that addresses the fundamental questions of existence, knowledge, and human purpose. It emerges from what Nagraj described as direct realisation (*anubhav*) of existence as co-existential, offering a comprehensive vision that integrates ontology, epistemology, ethics, economics, social organisation and Human Constitution and *Saarvbhaum Vyavstha* into a coherent whole (Nagraj, 2015, P.2).

This chapter explores Nagraj's life and intellectual journey, examines the context and content of his major writings, and analyses the ontological shift from a conflict-based to a harmony-based understanding that characterises his philosophy. While Madhyasth Darshan is not yet widely known in academic philosophy, it represents a significant contribution to human thought—one that deserves serious engagement and critical examination (Nagraj, 2015, P.2).

4.1 Life and Philosophical Background of A. Nagraj

Baba Nagraj, as he was known to his followers, was born in 1920 in

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Agrahar, Hasan District, Karnatka. His life was marked by deep spiritual seeking in Amarkantak, a sacred town in central India where the Narmada River originates. His early life was marked by deep spiritual seeking in Vedic traditions. Like many Indian seekers, he spent years in meditation and ascetic practices, seeking answers to fundamental questions about existence, consciousness, and liberation. This period culminated in what he described as a profound realisation experience (*Samadhi-Samyam*) in 1950, though he spent the subsequent decades elaborating and systematising the insights that emerged from it (Nagraj, 2008, p. 5; S. Pal, 2011).

Early Spiritual Journey: Nagraj's initial approach was rooted in traditional Indian spirituality, particularly the Advaita Vedanta tradition, which emphasises transcending the material world to realise Brahman. He practised intense meditation (*sadhana*) seeking liberation (*moksha*) as described in the Upanishads and later Vedantic texts. This was not academic philosophy but lived spiritual practice—hours of daily meditation, renunciation of worldly attachments, and a dedicated pursuit of transcendent truth (Nagraj, 2008, p. 6).

However, during his *sadhana* in the 1940s, Nagraj began to encounter difficulties with the traditional framework. The Advaitic path emphasised the illusory nature of the world (*maya*) and the need to transcend phenomenal existence to realise the unchanging Absolute. Yet Nagraj found this unsatisfying. If the world is ultimately unreal, why does it appear so persistently? If liberation means escaping embodied existence, what is the purpose of human life in society? These questions troubled him and suggested that something was incomplete in the traditional understanding (Nagraj, 2009, P.3).

The Realisation of 1950: According to Nagaraj's account, a fundamental shift in his understanding occurred in the 1950s. Instead of transcending the world to reach some absolute reality beyond it, he realised that existence itself is the absolute—not merely as formless Brahman, but as a concrete, structured, coexistent reality. All that exists is in eternal relation to nature

imbued with Brahman; existence is coexistence itself. There is no reality beyond or behind existence; existence itself is complete and self-evident. (Nagraj, 2008, P.13).

This realisation did not deny consciousness or spirituality. Instead, it understood consciousness as inherent in existence, not separate from it. The dichotomy between matter and spirit, between the worldly and the transcendent, dissolved. What remained was a vision of reality as fundamentally harmonious, with apparent conflicts arising from incomplete understanding rather than from the nature of existence itself. This was not merely a conceptual shift but, as Nagraj described, direct seeing (*anubhav*)—an experiential recognition of how things actually are (Nagraj, 2016, P.6).

From Realisation to Articulation: Following this realisation, Nagraj faced the challenge of articulating his vision in systematic form. He spent decades developing the philosophical framework now known as *Madhyasth Darshan*. This was not easy work. Traditional vocabularies seemed inadequate—they carried assumptions from the very frameworks he was trying to transcend. Western philosophical language was even more problematic, rooted as it is in subject-object dualism (Gaur, 2008).

Nagraj developed his own terminology (*Paribhasha Samhita*), drawing on Sanskrit roots (*Tatsam*) but giving them precise technical meanings within his system. Terms like *sah-astitva* (co-existence), *madhyasth* (middle-ness, equilibrium), *Jeevan* (life-energy), and *samadhan* (resolution, fulfilment) became key concepts in his philosophy. He wrote primarily in Hindi, producing a series of texts that systematically elaborate on different dimensions of his vision (Nagraj 2015, p. 52).

A Lived Philosophy: Importantly, Nagraj did not remain a solitary contemplative. He engaged with society, established communities attempting to live according to his principles, and trained students in his philosophy. *Madhyasth Darshan* was meant to be lived, not just studied. This practical orientation reflects the Indian philosophical tradition's emphasis on realisation through practice, as

well as Nagraj's conviction that philosophical truth must manifest in a transformed individual and collective life (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

4.2 Context of His Writings: The Three Foundational Texts

Nagraj's philosophy is systematically presented in three primary texts, each addressing different dimensions of human existence: humane/~~individual~~ conduct, humane economic organisation, and humane constitution for Manviya Vyavastha. Together, these texts constitute a comprehensive vision for human life and civilisation.

4.2.1 Manav Vyavahar Darshan (Philosophy of Human Conduct): Published in 2015, *this work addresses the question of right living—how should humans conduct themselves to achieve fulfilment and harmony?* The text begins with ontology (the nature of existence) and epistemology (how we know), then proceeds to elaborate a comprehensive ethics based on co-existential understanding (Nagraj, 2015, P.4).

The text is structured systematically, moving from foundational principles to practical applications. Nagraj begins by establishing that existence is co-existence—everything that exists does so in relationship with everything else. From this ontological foundation, he derives implications for knowledge: we can know reality because we exist within it, not as separate observers but as participants. Actual knowledge (gyan) arises from direct realisation (anubhav) of this co-existential nature (Nagraj, 2015, P.56).

The ethical portion of *Manav Vyavahar Darshan* elaborates what Nagraj calls "right understanding" (samajhdari). When we understand existence correctly—as co-existential rather than conflictual—specific ways of living naturally follow. We recognise our essential relationships with other humans, with other living beings, and with the material world. This recognition transforms behaviour not through imposed rules but through transformed understanding. Ethics becomes an expression of insight rather than obedience to commandments (Nagraj, 2015).

The text also addresses human psychology, particularly the problem of *bhram* (illusion or confusion) that arises from incomplete understanding. Nagraj analyses various forms of confusion—metaphysical, ethical, and social—and shows how they generate suffering and conflict. The solution is not suppression or control but rather the clarification that comes from correct understanding. This therapeutic dimension makes *Manav Vyavahar Darshan* not just a theoretical treatise but a practical guide to psychological and spiritual health (Gaur, 2008).

4.2.2 Avartansheel Arthashastra (Cyclical Economics): If *Manav Vyavahar Darshan* addresses individual conduct, *Avartansheel Arthashastra* (2009) tackles economic organisation. The title translates roughly as "The Science of Wealth in Cycles" or "Cyclical Economics." Nagraj proposes a fundamental reconception of economic life based on co-existential principles rather than competition and accumulation (Nagraj, 2009, P.21).

Contemporary economics, whether capitalist or socialist, operates on assumptions of scarcity, competition, and unlimited wants. Resources are limited; desires are infinite; therefore, economic life is necessarily a struggle. Nagraj challenges these assumptions. Actual human needs, he argues, are finite and can be met through appropriate organisation. What creates artificial scarcity is not the nature of existence but distorted understanding and unjust social structures (Nagraj, 2009, P.21).

Avartansheel Arthashastra proposes an economic system organised around cycles rather than linear growth. In nature, materials cycle—water, carbon, nutrients all move in closed loops. Human economic activity should mirror this cyclical pattern, ensuring that production serves genuine needs while maintaining ecological balance. This requires moving beyond the profit motive as the organising principle of economic life (Nagraj, 2009, p. 21).

The text details practical mechanisms: how production can be organised to serve use rather than exchange, how distribution can ensure sufficiency for all, how work can be dignified rather than

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exploitative, and how prosperity (Samriddhi) can be achieved without endless accumulation. While some proposals might seem utopian, they follow logically from co-existential principles and challenge us to imagine economic alternatives to current systems (Nagraj, 2009, p. 21).

4.2.3 Humane Constitution for Humane social order (Manviya Samvidhan for Manviya Vyavastha).

The third primary text, Humane Constitution (2007) for *Vyavastha*, addresses social and political organisation. The term *vyavastha* means order, system, or arrangement. How should human society be organised to enable individual fulfilment and collective harmony? This question has occupied political philosophy throughout history; Nagraj offers a distinctive answer grounded in co-existential ontology (Nagraj, 2007).

Nagraj argues that social conflict arises not from the nature of human beings (as Hobbes claimed) but from organisational systems based on incomplete understanding. When society is organised around competition for power, wealth, and status, conflict is inevitable. But if social organisation reflects co-existential understanding—recognising that human flourishing is inherently relational and interdependent—different structures become possible (Nagraj, 2016).

The humane constitution proposes what Nagraj calls *sarva-Bhaum Vyavasta*, a society organised to ensure universal prosperity, security, and fulfilment. This requires reconceiving fundamental institutions: family structures that support development rather than restrict it, educational systems that cultivate understanding rather than mere information, governance that coordinates collective action rather than exercises domination, and legal systems that resolve conflicts rather than merely punish transgression (Nagraj, 2007, P.98).

The text is detailed and systematic, addressing everything from family relationships to international order. Some proposals align with contemporary movements, including participatory democracy,

restorative justice, and ecological sustainability. Others are more radical, challenging assumptions so basic we rarely question them. Throughout, Nagraj insists that social transformation requires not just new policies but a transformed understanding—collective realisation of co-existential reality (Nagraj, 2007, P.98).

4.2.4 Additional Writings: Beyond these three primary texts, Nagraj produced numerous shorter writings, lectures, and dialogues addressing specific topics—education, family life, human psychology, the relationship between science and philosophy, and more. He also engaged in extensive dialogue with students and scholars, often clarifying and elaborating concepts from his major works. These additional materials provide valuable context and application of his core principles, though the three foundational texts remain the systematic presentation of Madhyasth Darshan.

4.3 The Ontological Shift from Conflict to Harmony

The heart of Nagraj's philosophy is an ontological claim: existence is fundamentally co-existential and harmonious. This directly contradicts the conflict-based ontologies that have dominated much of Western and some Eastern thought. Understanding this shift requires examining its meaning and why it matters.

4.3.1 Conflict-Based Ontologies: Much Western philosophy has assumed that conflict is fundamental to reality. For Heraclitus, war is the father of all things—existence is constituted by opposing forces in tension. Hegel's dialectic makes contradiction the engine of historical development. Marx grounds social analysis in class struggle. Freud sees the psyche as a battleground of conflicting drives. Darwinian evolution operates through competitive struggle for survival. Even liberal political theory begins with the problem of preventing the war of all against all (Hobbes) or adjudicating competing rights claims (Tarnas, 1993).

These are not mere metaphors but foundational assumptions about the nature of reality. If being itself is constituted by opposition—thesis against antithesis, organism against environment, individual

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against individual—then conflict is not a problem to be solved but a condition to be managed. Peace becomes merely a temporary absence of war, harmony a momentary balance of opposing forces. Progress requires struggle, and development emerges from overcoming obstacles (Berlin, 1990).

Even some Eastern traditions, while less overtly conflictual than Western thought, contain elements of opposition. The Samkhya dualism of Purusha and Prakriti, while not conflictual in the way Western dualisms are, still maintains a fundamental division. The Buddhist emphasis on suffering (*dukkha*) as the first noble truth can be interpreted as seeing existence itself as problematic—something to be escaped rather than embraced. The Jain emphasis on karma as bondage suggests that embodied existence is a trap from which we must free ourselves (Hiriyanna, 1993).

4.3.2 Co-Existential Ontology: Nagraj's fundamental insight is that these conflict-based ontologies misunderstand reality. Existence is not constituted by opposition but by relationship—specifically, by co-existence. Everything that exists does so in connection with everything else. There are no truly separate, independent entities struggling against one another. Instead, apparent separateness emerges from a deeper unity, and apparent conflicts arise from an incomplete understanding of this coexistential nature (Nagraj, 2015, p. 01).

This is not pantheism (all is God) or monism (all is one undifferentiated unity). Nagraj affirms real diversity and distinction. Things genuinely differ from one another—humans are not rocks, consciousness is not matter, and individual persons are distinct. But difference does not entail opposition. Things can be different while remaining related, diverse while participating in a larger whole, unique while co-existing harmoniously (Nagraj, 2015, P.1).

Consider an ecosystem. It contains great diversity—plants, animals, microorganisms, soil, water, and air. These elements are genuinely different, with distinct properties and behaviours. Yet they exist together in intricate relationships of mutual support. The tree

provides oxygen that animals breathe; animals provide carbon dioxide that plants need; decomposers break down dead organisms, returning nutrients to soil. Each element has its place and function within the whole. Conflict arises not from the nature of the system but from disruptions—often human-caused—of natural relationships (Nagraj, 2015, P.07).

Nagraj extends this insight from ecosystems to existence itself. Reality is structured like a healthy ecosystem—diverse elements in relationships of mutual support and reciprocal benefit. What we call conflict is actually a breakdown in these relationships, usually caused by incomplete understanding. When humans act on a mistaken understanding—seeing themselves as separate from nature, opposed to other humans, and needing to dominate or exploit—conflict arises where harmony is natural (Nagraj, 2015, P.07).

4.3.3 Implications for Human Existence: This ontological shift profoundly shapes how we understand human life and purpose. If conflict is fundamental to reality, then human existence is inherently problematic. We are thrown into a hostile world, must struggle for survival, compete with others for scarce resources, and ultimately face meaningless death. Meaning must be created through will or imposed through force; it is not given like things (Camus, 1955).

But if existence is co-existential, human life has a different character. We are not strangers in a hostile cosmos but participants in an interconnected whole. Our nature is not to struggle but to relate, not to dominate but to harmonise, not to escape existence but to realise its co-existential character. Suffering and conflict arise not from existence itself but from acting against our co-existential nature—from wrong understanding (Nagraj, 2015, P.1).

This transforms the goal of philosophy and spiritual practice. We are not trying to escape existence (as in some interpretations of Buddhism or Vedanta) or to master it (as in Western scientific and technological projects). Instead, we seek to understand existence correctly and to live in accordance with that understanding. This is

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what Nagraj calls *samadhan*—a term meaning resolution, fulfilment, or settlement. It is not transcendence of existence but fulfilment within it, not escape from relationship but right relationship, not conquest of nature but harmony with it (Nagraj, 2015, P.9).

4.3.4 Harmony as Natural, Conflict as Error: A key claim of Madhyasth Darshan is that harmony is natural while conflict is derivative. This reverses the common assumption that conflict is primary and harmony is an achievement. For Nagraj, the appearance of fundamental conflict is a mistake arising from incomplete understanding (*bhram*). When we see things correctly—as they actually are in their co-existential nature—harmony is evident (Nagraj, 2015, P.09).

This might seem naive or idealistic, especially given the violence and suffering that characterise much of human history. Yet Nagraj is not denying the reality of conflict and suffering; instead, he is analysing their source. Conflict is real but not fundamental; it arises from specific causes and can be addressed by removing those causes. The primary reason is a misunderstanding—conceptual frameworks that misrepresent reality's coexistence (Nagraj, 2008, p. 93).

Think of illness. Disease is real—people genuinely suffer and die from it. But health is more fundamental than disease. The body's natural state is functioning wholeness; illness represents a disruption of that wholeness. We address illness not by accepting it as fundamental but by understanding its causes and restoring health. Similarly, social conflict is real but not natural. Society's inherent tendency is toward cooperation and mutual support; conflict represents a disruption that can be addressed through transformed understanding (Nagraj, 2007, P.10).

Empirical and Rational Grounds: Nagraj supports his ontological claim through both empirical observation and rational analysis. Empirically, he notes that co-existence is evident everywhere we look. Atoms form molecules through bonding relationships. Living

cells arise from the coordinated interactions of their organelles. Organisms develop through their relationship with their environment. Human societies function through cooperation and communication. Even apparent competition (between businesses, between organisms) occurs within frameworks of cooperation (legal systems, ecological systems) (Nagraj, 2016, P.49).

Rationally, Nagraj argues that existence itself implies co-existence. For anything to exist, it must exist somewhere, somehow, in relation to other things. Pure, absolute independence is impossible—even space exists in relationship to the matter it contains or fails to contain. To speak of existence at all is already to talk about relationship. The question is not whether things coexist but whether we understand this coexistence correctly (Nagraj, 2016, p. 11).

Furthermore, consciousness itself is relational. To be conscious is to be conscious of something. Awareness implies a relationship between knower and known. The attempt to isolate a purely self-aware subject (Descartes' cogito) or a purely objective thing-in-itself (Kant's noumenon) produces abstractions that do not correspond to experienced reality. Experience is always relational—self and world co-arise in the moment of awareness (Varela, 1991).

4.4 Madhyasth as Centre/Co-existence

The term *madhyasth* deserves special attention. It means "middle" or "central" but in a specific sense, not a compromise between extremes, but a position that transcends opposition altogether. This recalls the Buddhist Middle Way, but Nagraj's conception has distinctive features (Nagraj, 2015, P.13). In Indian geometry and philosophy, *madhya* (middle) often refers not to a point equidistant from two extremes but to a centre from which various directions radiate. It is a place of balance and equilibrium from which one can move in any direction as appropriate, rather than being stuck in opposition between two fixed positions. *Madhyasth* thus suggests a stance of balance, comprehensiveness, and flexibility (Nagraj, 2015, p. 33).

Nagraj uses this term to describe both a metaphysical principle and

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an epistemological stance. Metaphysically, existence itself is *madhyasth*—it is the ground or medium (another meaning of the term) in which all things participate. Existence is not one pole opposed to non-existence; it is the comprehensive reality that includes all forms and processes. Nothing exists outside existence, and nothing within existence is absolutely independent (Nagraj, 2015, P. 36). Epistemologically, the *madhyasth* position avoids both absolutism and relativism. It is not absolutist—claiming final, complete knowledge immune to revision. But neither is it relativist—denying any objective truth and claiming all views are equally valid. Instead, it recognises that knowledge is perspectival (we always know from some position), while insisting that some perspectives grasp reality more adequately than others (Nagraj, 2015, p. 36).

This middle epistemology parallels the ontological insight. Just as things are distinct yet co-existent, knowledge claims can be diverse yet objectively comparable. We do not need to choose between dogmatic certainty and sceptical doubt. We can recognise the limitations of our knowledge while still making justified claims about reality. This requires intellectual humility combined with confidence—humility about the incompleteness of our understanding, and trust that understanding is nonetheless possible and worthwhile (Nagraj, 2015, p. 37).

4.4.1 Distinctiveness and Continuity with Tradition

Madhyasth Darshan is neither a complete break from Indian philosophical traditions nor a simple continuation of them. Understanding its relationship to earlier thought helps clarify its distinctive contribution.

Continuities: Like Advaita Vedanta, Madhyasth Darshan affirms non-dualism—reality is not ultimately divided between mind and matter, self and world, sacred and profane. Like Buddhism, it emphasises the importance of right understanding and the role of confusion in generating suffering. Like Jainism, it recognises complexity and warns against one-sided views. Like the Bhagavad

Gita, it seeks to integrate spiritual realisation with active engagement in the world.

Nagraj clearly emerged from and was nurtured by these traditions. His vocabulary, his methods of exposition, and his concern with liberation all reflect his grounding in Indian philosophy. He does not reject these traditions but claims to clarify and complete the insights they approached but did not fully articulate (Gaur, 2008).

Innovations: Yet Madhyasth Darshan also represents genuine innovation. Unlike Advaita, it does not treat the world as maya (illusion or appearance) but as reality itself. Unlike Buddhism, it does not emphasise suffering as the fundamental truth of existence but rather sees it as arising from a mistaken understanding of a fundamentally harmonious reality. Unlike traditional cosmologies, it does not accept fatalism or predetermined cycles but insists on human responsibility for realising and manifesting co-existential harmony (Nagraj, 2016, P.4).

Most significantly, Nagraj provides a systematic integration of ontology, epistemology, ethics, economics, and political philosophy within a single coherent framework. Traditional Indian philosophy often compartmentalised these domains—Vedanta for metaphysics, Dharmashastra for ethics, Arthashastra for politics and economics. Nagraj shows how all these dimensions flow from and express a single coexistential insight (Nagraj, 2015, p. 27; 2008; 2007).

Furthermore, Madhyasth Darshan engages with modern concerns in ways traditional philosophy often does not. It addresses environmental crisis, economic justice, political organisation, and scientific worldview—topics that ancient and medieval thinkers could not have anticipated. This makes it a living philosophy, responsive to contemporary challenges while grounded in perennial insights (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

Conclusion

A. Nagraj's philosophical journey—from traditional spiritual seeking through profound realisation to systematic articulation of

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Madhyasth Darshan—represents a significant contribution to human thought. His discovery, if we may call it that, is simple but profound: existence is co-existence. This ontological insight, when fully understood and applied, has implications for every dimension of human life.

The three foundational texts—*Manav Vyavahar Darshan*, *Avartansheel Arthashastra*, and *Manav Samvidhan*—systematically elaborate these implications for individual conduct, economic organisation, and social order. Together, they constitute a comprehensive philosophy that addresses the fragmentation diagnosed in Part I of this work and offers a genuinely integrative alternative.

The ontological shift from conflict to harmony is not merely a theoretical adjustment but a transformation in how we understand ourselves and our world. If Nagraj is correct—if existence really is fundamentally co-existential rather than conflictual—then much of human suffering and struggle represents error, not necessity. We have been living according to a wrong understanding, organising societies on false assumptions, and perpetuating unnecessary conflicts. The possibility of transformation depends on recognising this error and realising the co-existential truth.

The following chapters will examine in greater detail the core principles of Madhyasth Darshan and its epistemological foundations. Our task is neither uncritical acceptance nor dismissive rejection, but serious engagement with a philosophical system that may help us move beyond the dualisms and conflicts that have characterised so much of human thought and history.

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Chapter 5: Core Principles of Madhyasth Darshan

Introduction

Having explored the life and context of A. Nagraj's philosophical development, we now turn to the systematic content of Madhyasth Darshan. This chapter examines the core principles that structure Nagraj's vision: the fundamental ontological claim that existence is co-existence (*sah-astitva*), the four-fold order of nature, the integrated path from knowledge through understanding to right living, and the four-fold purpose of human existence.

These principles are not isolated doctrines but interconnected dimensions of a unified vision. Each principle illuminates the others, and together they constitute a comprehensive framework for understanding reality and human life within it. Our exploration will be both expository—explaining what Nagraj claims—and analytical, examining the logic and implications of these claims (Nagraj, 2015).

5.1 Existence as Co-Existence (*Sah-Astitva*)

The foundational principle of Madhyasth Darshan is deceptively simple: existence is co-existence (*sah-astitva*). Yet this simple claim has profound implications. To fully grasp it, one must understand what Nagraj means by existence, what he means by coexistence, and why their identity is not merely a tautology but a substantive philosophical insight.

5.1.1 What Is Existence? For Nagraj, existence (*astitva*) is the most basic and comprehensive reality. It is not a property that things have (as in "this chair exists") but the ground or medium in which all things participate. Existence is not created by anything more fundamental—it is self-evident and self-sufficient. There is no "before existence" or "outside existence"; these phrases are

meaningless because any attempt to think or speak already occurs within existence (Nagraj, 2015).

This might sound obvious, but it contradicts various philosophical positions. Idealism claims that the mind or consciousness is more fundamental than physical existence. Materialism holds that matter is the ultimate reality and that everything else reduces to it. Theistic philosophies place God as the creator of existence, implying that God is somehow before or beyond existence itself. Nagraj rejects all these claims. Existence is not reducible to mind or matter, nor is it created by or dependent on anything else (Nagraj, 2015).

Furthermore, existence is saturated—complete. No space or void is truly non-existent. Even what we call space or vacuum is part of existence, has properties, and participates in relationships. This complete fullness (*sampurna*) of existence is crucial for understanding co-existence. If existence were partial or incomplete, things might genuinely exist in isolation. But because existence is complete and continuous, everything within it necessarily exists in relationship (Nagraj, 2015).

5.1.2 What Is Co-Existence? Co-existence (*sah-astitva*) means to exist together or to exist with. The prefix *sah-* indicates togetherness, simultaneity, and mutual relationship. Everything that exists does so in company with everything else. There are no isolated entities, no truly independent substances, no things that exist "in themselves" without reference to anything else (Gaur, 2008).

This co-existential nature manifests in various ways. Spatially, things exist together—no object occupies space without a relationship to surrounding space and other objects. Temporally, events occur together in sequence and simultaneity. Causally, things influence and are influenced by different things—cause and effect are co-existential relationships. Structurally, complex entities are composed of simpler ones in organised relationships. At every level and in every dimension, existence displays co-existential character (Nagraj, 2015).

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Importantly, co-existence does not eliminate distinction. Things remain different while existing together. A tree co-exists with the soil, water, and air that nourish it, but the tree is not the same as soil, water, or air. Individual humans coexist with family, society, and the ecosystem, yet retain their distinct identities while participating in these larger wholes. Co-existence thus allows for both unity and diversity, relationship and distinction (Nagraj, 2010).

5.1.3 Why Existence IS Co-Existence: The claim is not just that things exist together (which might be a contingent fact) but that existence itself IS co-existence (a necessary truth). What does this mean? Nagraj argues that to exist at all is already to co-exist. The concept of a thing existing in absolute isolation, with no relationships to anything else, is incoherent—not merely false but meaningless.

Consider what it would mean for something to exist in complete independence. It would have no location (because location implies spatial relationship). It would have no duration (because time implies a relationship to the past and future). It would have no properties (because properties involve relationships—hardness is pressure resistance, colour is interaction with light, mass is gravitational relationship). A completely independent, relationless entity would be indistinguishable from nothing at all. Therefore, to exist is necessarily to exist in relationship—to co-exist (Nagraj, 2015).

This argument parallels certain insights from Buddhism and process philosophy. Nagarjuna argued that all phenomena are "empty" of independent existence because they arise dependently through causes and conditions (Nagarjuna, trans. 1995). Alfred North Whitehead claimed that the ultimate metaphysical principle is that all actual entities are constituted by their relationships—"the many become one and are increased by one" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 21). Nagraj's co-existential ontology shares this relational emphasis while developing it in distinctive directions.

5.1.3 Implications for Knowledge:

If existence is co-existential, then knowledge is possible. This might seem paradoxical—how does co-existence enable knowledge? The answer lies in recognising that knowledge is itself a co-existential relationship. When I know something, I exist in a relationship with it. Subject and object are not separate substances that somehow bridge a gap, but co-existential aspects of a single situation (Nagraj, 2015). This resolves the epistemological problems that plague dualistic philosophies. Descartes worried about how the mind can know the external world if they are separate substances. Kant argued that we can know only appearances, never things-in-themselves. Nagraj responds that these problems arise from false premises. Subject and object are not separate substances but co-existential aspects of existence. Knowing is a natural relationship within existence, not a mysterious connection between existence and something outside it (Gaur, 2008).

This does not mean knowledge is automatic or infallible. We can misunderstand and make mistakes. But these errors arise not from an unbridgeable gap between mind and world but from incomplete or distorted co-existential relationships. Correcting errors involves clarifying relationships, not somehow crossing from subjective consciousness to objective reality (Nagraj, 2015).

5.1.4 Implications for Ethics: Co-existential ontology also grounds ethics. If I am essentially related to others—if their existence is bound up with mine and mine with theirs—then my actions necessarily affect them and their actions affect me. Ethics is not about extending sympathy across a divide that separates me from others. Instead, it is recognising what is already the case—our essential interconnection—and acting in accordance with that recognition (Nagraj, 2007).

This provides ethics with an objective foundation without appealing to divine command, abstract principles, or subjective preferences. Right action is action that accords with co-existential reality; wrong action is action based on the illusion of separateness. When I harm another, I am acting against the co-existential nature of reality, creating disharmony that affects not only the other but also myself

and the larger whole. Ethics thus becomes a matter of understanding reality correctly and living in accordance with that understanding (Nagraj, 2015).

5.2 The Four Orders of Nature: A Structured Cosmos

Nagraj's vision of existence is not an undifferentiated oneness but a structured, ordered whole. He identifies four distinct orders or levels of natural organisation: material order (*padarth avastha*), pranic or bio-physical order (*pran avastha*), animal-conscious order (*jiv avastha*), and human-conscious order (*gyan avastha*). Each order has its own characteristics within the larger co-existential whole (Nagraj, 2015).

5.2.1 Material Order (Padarth Avastha): The material order encompasses what we ordinarily call physical reality—atoms, molecules, minerals, planetary bodies, and the physical aspects of living beings. This order operates according to the physical and chemical laws described by science: gravity, electromagnetism, thermodynamics, and so forth. Material entities have specific properties—mass, charge, and atomic structure—and interact according to determinate patterns (Nagraj, 2015, p. 8).

Importantly, Nagraj does not treat matter as inert or "dead" as some philosophies do. Matter is active, organised, and participatory in existence. Atoms bond to form molecules; molecules organise into crystals and complex structures. Even seemingly simple material processes involve remarkable order and complexity. The material order is the foundation upon which other orders emerge, providing the physical substrate for life and consciousness.

However, matter alone is not sufficient for life. While living beings contain matter and operate according to physical laws, they exhibit properties and behaviours that purely material systems do not. This is not to invoke dualism—life is not a separate substance added to matter. Rather, life represents a new level of organisation, a different order within the co-existential whole (Nagraj, 2015).

5.2.2 Pranic or Bio-Physical Order (Pran Avastha): The term *pran* is often translated as "life force" or "vital energy," but Nagraj uses it more precisely to describe the organising principle of living systems. The pranic order includes all living beings—plants, fungi, bacteria—that exhibit growth, reproduction, and metabolism but not consciousness as we ordinarily understand it.

Plants, for instance, are alive and responsive to their environment. They grow toward light, extend roots toward water, and respond to touch and chemical signals. Yet they do not have the kind of centralised consciousness that enables intentional action or subjective experience (as far as we can tell). The pranic order represents organised complexity beyond purely physical systems—homeostasis, self-organisation, adaptation—but without the awareness characteristic of animals (Nagraj, 2015, P.14).

The pranic order is not separate from the material order but rather an elaboration of it. Living beings are made of matter and follow physical laws, but they organise matter in distinctive ways that generate new properties and capacities. This is emergence—genuinely novel properties arising from complex organisation—but within a co-existential framework. The pranic does not oppose or transcend the material; it represents matter organised in the specific way we call life (Capra, 1996; Nagraj, 2015).

5.2.3 Animal-Conscious Order (Jiv Avastha): The animal order introduces consciousness—awareness, sensation, perception, and intentional action. Animals not only respond to their environment (as plants do) but experience it. There is "something it is like" to be an animal—subjective experience with its pleasures, pains, desires, and fears (Nagel, 1974; Nagraj, 2015, P.24).

This conscious awareness enables new capacities: learning from experience, making choices based on perception, experiencing emotions, and forming social bonds. Animals are not merely stimulus-response machines but agents with interests, preferences, and primitive forms of understanding. A dog knows its owner, remembers where food is found, and feels loyalty or fear. These

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capacities distinguish the animal order from the pranic (Bekoff, 2007).

Yet, according to Nagraj, animal consciousness operates primarily at the sensory and emotional levels. Animals are aware of their immediate environment and their bodily states. Still, they do not reflect on their awareness, question the nature of reality, or imagine radically different ways of living. Animal consciousness is embedded in the present moment and oriented toward immediate needs—food, safety, reproduction, and social connection. This is not a deficiency but the characteristic nature of the animal order (Nagraj, 2015, P.14).

As the pranic order emerges from the material, the animal order emerges from the pranic. Animals are living beings with all the properties of life—growth, metabolism, reproduction—plus the additional properties of consciousness. Again, this is not dualism. Consciousness is not a separate substance added to life but a new level of organisation within the co-existential whole (Nagraj, 2015, P.14).

5.2.4 Human-Conscious Order (Gyan Avastha): The fourth order, uniquely human, is characterised by self-reflective consciousness and the capacity for conceptual understanding (*gyan*). Humans not only are conscious but are conscious of being conscious. We can reflect on our experiences, question their meaning, imagine alternatives to the present reality, and transmit understanding across generations through language and culture (Nagraj, 2015, p. 14).

This self-reflective capacity gives rise to distinctly human phenomena: language, abstract thought, moral reasoning, art, science, philosophy, religion, and technology. Humans can ask "Why?"—not just "What?" or "How?" We wonder about the nature of existence, the meaning of life, and the basis of right and wrong. We can conceptualise things we have never experienced, plan for distant futures, and learn from the experiences of long-dead ancestors (Tomasello, 1999).

Most significantly for Nagraj's philosophy, humans have the capacity to understand co-existence itself—to grasp the nature of reality, recognise our place within it, and choose to live in accordance with that understanding. Animals co-exist but do not understand co-existence. Humans can both co-exist and comprehend co-existence, making possible a quality of life unavailable to other orders (Nagraj, 2015).

However, this capacity for understanding also creates the possibility of misunderstanding (*bhram*). Humans can develop false concepts about reality, ourselves, and our relationships. We can imagine ourselves as separate from nature, opposed to other humans, or fundamentally isolated. These conceptual errors generate unnecessary suffering and conflict. The distinctively human task is thus to develop proper/right understanding and to live according to it—to realise our co-existential nature not just unconsciously but consciously and deliberately (Nagraj, 2015).

5.2.4 Continuity and Hierarchy: The four orders are continuous and hierarchical, but not in a dominating sense. Each higher order includes and builds upon lower orders while adding new properties. Humans are material beings (we have bodies and follow physical laws), pranic beings (we are alive, metabolise, and reproduce), and animal beings (we have sensory consciousness, emotions, and immediate awareness). But we also have capacities that distinguish us—self-reflection, conceptual understanding, ethical reasoning (Nagraj, 2015).

This is hierarchical in the sense that each order presupposes the ones below it—there can be no animal consciousness without life, no life without matter. But it is not hierarchical in the sense that higher orders are "better" or should dominate lower ones. Each order has its own dignity and value. Matter is not inferior to life; life is not inferior to consciousness. Instead, each order contributes to the richness and complexity of existence as a whole.

Furthermore, the orders are interdependent. Humans depend on the material order for our bodies and environment, on the pranic order

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for food and oxygen (produced by plants), and share the planet with the animal order. Recognising this interdependence is crucial for understanding our proper relationship to nature. We are not separate from or above nature but participants within the natural order, distinguishable by our unique capacities but inseparable from the whole (Nagraj, 2015; Capra, 1996).

5.3 Knowledge, Understanding, and Right Living (Gyan–Bodh–Vyavahar)

Nagraj articulates a three-fold process connecting knowledge, understanding, and conduct: *gyan* (knowledge), *bodh* (understanding or realisation), and *vyavahar* (behaviour or conduct). This triadic structure is central to Madhyasth Darshan's vision of human development and transformation (Nagraj, 2015).

5.3.1 Gyan: Knowledge as Information: The first level, *gyan*, refers to knowledge in the sense of information, concepts, theories, and beliefs. This includes both everyday knowledge (the sun rises in the east, water boils at 100°C) and systematic knowledge accumulated in various disciplines (physics, biology, history, philosophy). *Gyan* is transmissible through language—we can tell others what we know, write it in books, teach it in schools (Gaur, 2008).

Much education focuses exclusively on this level—transmitting information from those who know to those who do not yet know. Students memorise facts, learn theories, and acquire skills. This is valuable and necessary, but Nagraj insists it is insufficient. Information alone does not guarantee understanding, and understanding alone does not guarantee right action (Nagraj, 2015).

Consider someone who has studied ethics extensively. They can recite moral principles, analyse ethical dilemmas, and discuss different philosophical positions. They have *gyan* regarding ethics. But this conceptual knowledge does not necessarily make them ethical in their actual conduct. Many people know the right thing to do but fail to do it. Knowledge at the level of *gyan* is necessary but not sufficient for transformation.

5.3.2 Bodh: Understanding Through Realisation: The second level, *bodh*, means understanding in a more profound sense—insight, realisation, or direct comprehension. This is not merely knowing about something but grasping its significance, seeing how it applies to one's own life, understanding it "from the inside." (Nagraj, 2015, p. 45).

Bodh cannot be transmitted through words the way *gyan* can. A teacher can provide information, but understanding must arise in the student through their own contemplation and experience. This is why traditional Indian pedagogy emphasised not just instruction but practice, reflection, and the student's own realisation. The guru's role was not merely to convey information but to facilitate the student's awakening to truth (Gaur, 2008).

In Madhyasth Darshan, *bodh* specifically refers to understanding co-existential reality. One might have *gyan* that existence is co-existence—one might have read about it, discussed it, even believed it conceptually. But *bodh* means directly understanding the co-existential nature in one's own experience. It is the difference between knowing the description of swimming and actually being able to swim, between reading about love and experiencing it oneself (Nagraj, 2015, P.45).

This understanding is often described as *anubhav* (direct experience or realisation). It is not mystical in the sense of being irrational or ineffable, but it is experiential rather than merely conceptual. When one realises co-existence at the level of *bodh*, it transforms one's entire relationship to reality. What was abstract becomes concrete; what was theoretical becomes lived (Nagraj, 2015, P.45).

5.3.3 Vyavahar: Right Conduct: The third level, *vyavahar*, refers to conduct, behaviour, or practical living. Right understanding naturally expresses itself in right action. When one truly understands co-existential reality—when one has *bodh*, not just *gyan*—one's behaviour spontaneously aligns with that understanding. This is not forced obedience to external rules but a natural expression of internal realisation (Nagraj, 2015, P.46).

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For example, when one genuinely understands that harming others harms oneself (because we are co-existentially connected), one naturally refrains from causing harm. This is not moral calculation ("I should not harm others because it is wrong") but direct recognition ("Harming others makes no sense given our essential relationship"). Right conduct flows from right understanding as naturally as water flows downhill (Gaur, 2008).

This explains why moral exhortation and rule-following so often fail to create lasting change. Rules can temporarily modify behaviour through fear of punishment or hope of reward, but they do not transform the underlying understanding that generates behaviour. Genuine transformation requires *bodh*—the insight that makes right action self-evidently appropriate rather than merely obligatory (Nagraj, 2015, P.45).

5.3.4 The Integrated Path: The three levels are sequential but not separate. One begins with *gyan*—learning concepts and theories about co-existence. Through contemplation, discussion, and attentive observation of reality, this conceptual knowledge can mature into *bodh*—direct understanding. And *bodh* naturally manifests as *vyavahar*—conduct that expresses and reinforces learning. Each level supports the others in an upward spiral of development (Nagraj, 2015, P.45).

This integrated path addresses the problem of the theory-practice gap that plagues much philosophy and education. We are not satisfied with knowledge that remains theoretical, nor with practices divorced from understanding. Madhyasth Darshan insists that genuine wisdom integrates knowing, understanding, and living. The fully developed human being embodies this integration—they see, they know, and they live according to that understanding (Nagraj, 2015, P.46).

Moreover, this path is available to everyone, not just intellectual elites. While some may have more conceptual sophistication (*gyan*), the crucial *bodh* and resulting *vyavahar* are accessible to anyone willing to engage in sincere contemplation and practice. This

democratises philosophy, making wisdom a human birthright rather than a specialised achievement (Nagraj, 2015, p. 46).

5.4 Human Purpose: Samadhan, Samriddhi, Abhay, Sah-Astitva

Having established the nature of existence, the orders of nature, and the path from knowledge to right living, Nagraj articulates a four-fold vision of human purpose and fulfilment. Human life, rightly understood and lived, realises four interrelated goals: *samadhan* (resolution/fulfilment), *samriddhi* (prosperity), *abhay* (fearlessness), and conscious participation in *sah-astitva* (co-existence) (Nagraj, 2015, P.45).

5.4.1 Samadhan: Resolution and Fulfilment: The term *samadhan* is rich and difficult to translate precisely. It suggests resolution (of problems or conflicts), satisfaction (of needs or desires), and fulfilment (of potential or purpose). At its core, *samadhan* means a state of inner peace and completeness—no longer driven by unfulfilled desires, no longer disturbed by unresolved conflicts, no longer searching for what is missing (Nagraj, 2015, p. 9).

Samadhan is not contentment born of lowered expectations or resignation to suffering. Rather, it is fulfilment that arises from right understanding and right living. When one understands co-existential reality and lives accordingly, the restlessness and dissatisfaction that characterise much human life dissolve. One is no longer seeking happiness in external acquisitions or achievements, having found fulfilment in understanding itself (Nagraj, 2015, P.44).

This does not mean passive withdrawal from life. *Samadhan* is compatible with active engagement in work, relationships, and social contribution. But it transforms the quality of that engagement. One acts not from desperate need or anxious striving but from fullness and clarity. One can enjoy success without being attached to it and face difficulties without being defeated by them. This inner stability and peace is the foundation of human flourishing (Nagraj, 2015, P.44).

5.4.2 Samriddhi: Prosperity and Abundance: *Samriddhi* refers to prosperity, but not merely material wealth. It encompasses sufficiency in all dimensions of life—material resources, healthy relationships, meaningful work, and development opportunities. A society characterised by *samriddhi* ensures that all members have what they need to live well and to develop their capacities (Nagraj, 2001, p. 21).

Nagraj's vision of *samriddhi* challenges both capitalist and socialist understandings of prosperity. Against capitalism, he argues that prosperity is not individual accumulation in competition with others but collective sufficiency achieved through cooperation. Against traditional socialism, he insists that prosperity requires not just the redistribution of existing wealth but a transformed understanding of what wealth means and how it should be produced and shared (Nagraj, 2009, p. 8).

True prosperity, according to Madhyasth Darshan, is sustainable and universal. It does not require endless growth or the exploitation of nature or other humans. Rather, it recognises that genuine human needs are finite and can be met through appropriate organisation of production and distribution. When society is organised according to co-existential principles, *samriddhi* becomes possible for all without environmental destruction or social injustice (Nagraj, 2009, P.22).

5.4.3 Abhay: Fearlessness and Security: *Abhay* means "without fear"—a state of fearlessness or security. This is not the false security of military might or accumulated wealth (which always proves inadequate against death, loss, and change). Rather, it is the deep security that comes from understanding one's place in existence and living in accordance with that understanding (Nagraj, 2015).

Many of our fears arise from a wrong understanding. We fear death because we identify with the body and do not understand our essential nature. We fear loss because we are attached to possessions and relationships in ways that deny their impermanent character. We fear others because we see them as threats to our interests rather than

as co-existential participants with whom we share our well-being (Gaur, 2008).

When one realises co-existential reality, these fears do not magically disappear; they lose their grip. One recognises that while the body dies, one participates in an existence that continues. While particular possessions and relationships come and go, the fundamental reality of the relationship persists. While individuals may harm one another through misunderstanding, our essential nature is not opposition but connection. This understanding does not eliminate all fear—reasonable caution remains appropriate—but it dissolves the existential anxiety that haunts unexamined life (Nagraj, 2015).

Furthermore, *Abhay* has a social dimension. A society organised according to co-existential principles would provide genuine security—not through force and surveillance but through relationships of mutual care and justice. When people understand their essential connection and organise social institutions to reflect that understanding, the insecurity generated by exploitation, inequality, and conflict diminishes (Nagraj, 2007).

5.4.4 Sah-Astitva: Conscious Co-Existence: The fourth purpose is conscious participation in co-existence itself. All beings co-exist, but humans have the unique capacity to understand co-existence and to choose to live in accordance with that understanding. This conscious co-existence represents the fulfilment of human potential—living not merely by instinct or custom but by insight and choice (Nagraj, 2015).

Conscious co-existence manifests in multiple ways: in personal relationships characterised by mutual respect and care; in economic activity that serves genuine needs while maintaining ecological balance; in political organisation that coordinates collective action without domination; in cultural creativity that celebrates diversity within unity. In all these domains, humans can move from unconscious or conflictual co-existence to conscious and harmonious co-existence (Nagraj, 2015).

This fourth purpose encompasses and fulfils the first three.

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Samadhan is inner recognition of co-existential reality; *samriddhi* is material manifestation of co-existential principles; *abhay* is security arising from co-existential understanding. Together, they constitute a comprehensive vision of human flourishing—individually fulfilled, materially sufficient, psychologically secure, and consciously connected to the larger whole (Nagraj, 2015).

5.4.5 Integration and Balance: Like the Purushartha framework discussed in Chapter 3, Nagraj's four-fold purpose recognises multiple dimensions of human life without reducing them to a single goal. Material prosperity without inner fulfilment is empty; spiritual realisation without social responsibility is incomplete; individual security without collective wellbeing is unstable. A fully realised human life integrates all four purposes in dynamic balance (Nagraj, 2015). This integration operates at both individual and collective levels. Each person should develop toward *samadhan*, *samriddhi*, *abhay*, and conscious co-existence in their own life. But these goals cannot be fully achieved individually—they require social conditions that support them. Thus, Madhyasth Darshan links personal transformation with social transformation. Individual realisation and collective organisation must proceed together, each supporting and enabling the other (Nagraj, 2015, 2007).

5.5 The Value System in Co-Existentialism and Its Purpose

The philosophy of co-existentialism recognises that the transformation of established values (*sthaapit moolya*) inherent in established relationships (*sthaapit sambandh*) is impossible in any country, time, or circumstance. This permanence (*sthaayitva*) is the hallmark of stability and the fundamental reason for the inevitability of these values in human co-existence. At the heart of this philosophy lies the understanding that human beings do not exist in isolation but are inherently interconnected through relationships that define and give meaning to their existence.

Co-existentialism identifies nine established values (*sthaapit moolya*) that form the foundation of human social life and mutual

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existence. These values are gratitude (kritagyata), honour (gaurav), reverence (shraddha), love (prem), trust (vishwas), parental affection (vatsalya), maternal compassion (mamta), respect (sammaan), and affection (sneh). These nine social values (saamaajik moolya) constitute the basis of humaneness (maanaveeyata) and natural human conduct, serving as the framework through which individuals relate to one another in the shared space of existence. Among these fundamental values, trust (vishwas) embodies equality (saamya moolya), recognising that co-existence requires a foundation of confidence and that no relationship can be healthy without trust. Love (prem), on the other hand, represents the complete or perfect value (poorn moolya), embodying the fullest expression of human connection and the



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ultimate purpose of co-existential relationships. Love manifests in different forms across the other eight values, because each established value is related to love, as proven through experience (anubhav). This itself is the proof that truth is love, love is complete, complete is experience, and experience is truth.

During the course of practical living (vyavahaar nirvah) within the co-existential framework, these established values are accompanied by codes of conduct that manifest as courtesy or civility (shishthata). This courtesy expresses itself through gentleness (saumyata), simplicity (saralata), venerability (pujyata), exclusiveness (ananyata), graciousness (saujannyata), naturalness (sahajata), generosity (udarta), cordiality (sauhardrata), and dedication (nishtha). These qualities remain dedicated to established values and serve as the practical expression of co-existential principles in daily interactions. Without the fulfilment of established values through courtesy, integrity (akhandta) in human beings, and its inviolability (akshunnataa), it is impossible. The purpose of this courtesy is not merely social nicety but the practical realisation of co-existence itself, where each individual's actions reflect an awareness of their interconnectedness with others. (Manav Abhyas Darshan, 2004)

Value Hierarchy - Greater values (Guru Moolya) contain lesser values (Laghu Moolya)

Level	Value Type	Hindi Term	Nature	Manifestation
1	Life Values	Jeevan Moolya	Ultimate Foundation	Contains all other values
2	Human Values	Maanav Moolya	Human Essence	Dedicated to Life Values
3	Complete/Perfect Value	Poorn Moolya	Love (Prem)	Contains Established Values
4	Established Values (9)	Sthaapit Moolya	Unchangeable	In Experience (Anubhav)

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5	Courteous Values (9)	Shishth Moolya	Definite	In Behaviour (Vyavahaar)
6	Production Values (2)	Utpaadan Moolya	Determined	In Production-Utility

VALUES TABLE

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VALUES TABLE				
No.	Established Values	Hindi Term	Courteous Expressions	Special Significance
1.	Gratitude	Kritagyata	Gentleness	Saumyata
2.	Honour/Pride	Gaurav	Simplicity	Saralata
3.	Reverence	Shraddha	Venerability	Pujyata
4.	Love	Prem		Ananyata
5.	Trust	Vishwas	Exclusiveness	Complete / Perfect Value (Poorn Moolya) —
6.	Parental Affection	Vatsalya	Naturalness	Sahajata
7.	Maternal Compassion	Mamta	Generosity	Udarta
4.	Respect	सिमान	Equality Value — (Saamya Moolya) —	
7.	Parental Affection	Vatsalya	Naturalness	Sahajata
8.	Maternal Compassion	Mamta	Generosity	Udarta
8.	Respect	Samman	Cordiality	Sauhardrata
9.	Affection	Sneh	Dedication	Nishtha

Unchangeable values (Sthaapit Moolya) and their expression in

conduct (Shishthata)

Established Value	Hindi Term	Courteous Expression	Hindi Term	Special Significance
Gratitude	Kritagyata	Gentleness	Saumyata	-
Honour/Pride	Gaurav	Simplicity	Saralata	-
Reverence	Shraddha	Venerability	Pujyata	-
Love	Prem	Exclusiveness	Ananyata	Complete/Perfect Value (Poorn Moolya)
Trust	Vishwas	Graciousness	Saujannyata	Equality Value (Saamya Moolya)
Parental Affection	Vatsalya	Naturalness	Sahajata	-
Maternal Compassion	Mamta	Generosity	Udarta	-
Respect	Sammaan	Cordiality	Sauhardrata	-
Affection	Sneh	Dedication	Nishtha	-

5.6 Dimensions of Co-Existential Life

Co-existentialism recognises three fundamental dimensions of human life that must be integrated for complete human fulfilment. Socially established values, accompanied by courtesy, exist as practical ease in the form of intellectual resolution (bauddhik samaadhaan), addressing the dimension of understanding and wisdom. For bodily sustenance (shareer nirvah), protection (sanrakshan), and enhancement (samvardhan), material prosperity (bhautik samriddhi) is necessary, addressing the physical dimension of existence. These needs (aavashyaktayen) are found in a state of

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equilibrium when properly understood within the co-existential framework. Human beings produce (utpaadan) for material prosperity, the utility (upyogita) of which lies within the limits of aspiration (aakaanksha), both ambitious (mahatvaakaanksha) and common (saamaanya aakaanksha). This too is an inseparable dimension of life, yet it is clear that production is not the entirety of human life. This understanding compels human beings to follow social, economic, and political systems that reflect the reality of co-existence rather than isolated individual survival.

The Complete Value Set (Moolya-Samuchchaya)



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Complete Value (Poorn Moolay) + Established Values (09) +
Courteous Values (09) + Utility Value + Beauty (Kala) Value (02)

Social Valuedness (Saamaajik Moolyavatta)

= Established Values + Courteous Values

Culture (Sanskriti)

Society's capacity to accept social values (Sveekar Kshamata)

Civilisation (Sabhyata)

Society's capacity to carry forward social values (Vahan Kshamata)

The Cycle of Truth

Truth is Love → Love is Complete → Complete is Experience →
Experience is Truth.

Knowledge and Love

Knowledge is Love and Love is Knowledge (Gyaan hi Prem aur
Prem hi Gyaan)

Justice as the Foundation of Co-Existence

The foundation of co-existential practice and Just living (vyavahaaratmak janavad) is justice (nyaaya) alone, because every human being is a seeker (yaachak) of justice from birth. This innate seeking of justice reflects the fundamental co-existential reality that humans are born into relationships and therefore require fairness within them. Justice serves as the basis for the unity and coordination of social, economic, and political ethics (neetitray), as well as for justifiable thinking, observation, and clarification. Justice is the foundation of conduct (vyavahaar) in co-existential relationships because it ensures that the interconnectedness of human beings does not become a source of exploitation but rather a source of mutual fulfilment. Justice is the basis for humans to be assured (aashvast) and confident (vishvast) in their mutual relationships (parasparata), creating the conditions for co-existence to flourish rather than become a burden.

The Unity and Purpose of Co-Existential Living

In the tradition of an undivided society (akhand samaaj) understood through co-existentialism, the fulfilment (nirvah) of established values is the expression of courtesy and the proper use (sadupyog) of wealth (arth). The thread of unity (eksootrata) in individual (vaiyaktik), family (paarivaarik), social (saamaajik), national (raashtreey), and international (antarraashtreey) life is justice, manifesting the co-existential principle at every level of human organisation. This is the universal aspiration (sarvabhaum kaamana) that finds fulfilment in individual conduct (aacharan) and behaviour (vyavahaar), family cooperation (sahyog) and collaborative work (sahakarya), social encouragement (protsaahan) and inspiration (prerana), national protection (sanrakshan) and enhancement (samvardhan), and international favourable conditions and unity. The purpose of co-existentialism is revealed in this progression, showing that human fulfilment cannot be achieved in isolation but only through the realisation of interconnectedness at expanding scales of relationship.

This is what constitutes the fulfillment of the three ideologies (vaadatray) in all humanity: the balance of personality and talent (vyaktitva evam pratibhaa) in the individual, which is their conduct (aacharan); the cooperative family (sahkaari parivaar); society worthy of encouragement (protsaahan yogya samaaj); a system worthy of protection and enhancement (sanrakshan-samvardhan yogya vyavastha), that is, the nation (rashtra) meaning legal system and education (vidhi vyavastha shiksha); and an international system capable of creating balance and favorable conditions (anukool paristhiti). (Manav Abhyas Darshan, 2004)

The Three-Fold Order: Law, Policy, and Method

Co-existential order (vyavastha) is the combined form of law (vidhi), policy (neeti), and method (paddhatee). Law is proven in experience (anubhav), policy in behaviour (vyavahaar), and procedures in production and regulation (utpaadan-viniyam).

Law (vidhi) is specialised knowledge that makes established values

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and courteous values comprehensible (bodhgamyā) and practicable (vyavahārgamyā). This specialised understanding relates to existence (satta), connected nature (sāmprikta prakṛiti) and its evolutionary order (vikāskram), and the consequent philosophy and capacity worthy of experience. The capacity for experience establishes non-disparity (nirviśmataa) and unity (eksootrata) in reference to society and sociality. This proves established values through experience and courteous values through behaviour. This is the law.

Policy (neeti) is the process of following destiny-order (niyati kramanusaran-prakriyā). Destiny-order is the order of development (vikāas) and awakening (jaagṛti). Progress in accordance with destiny-order is qualitative change (gunaatmak parivartan).

Method (paddhatee) refers to the definite meaningfulness (nishchit arthvatta) that is established "in, from, and for" each step (pad). Method is the attainment of utility (upyogita), worthiness (upaadeyata), and necessity (anivāryata) connected with destiny-order-ness, and the forward program following this attainment. This is the tradition of qualitative change, which will continue until conduct becomes complete. In this method, assurance (aashvaasan) and confidence (viśhvasan) are naturally established. The method of qualitative change is itself principle (siddhaant), development (vikāas), and awakening (jaagṛti).

The Nature of Universal Order and Education

All institutions that exist within the limits of family and class are considered to be in the first and second stages. The failure of all experiments conducted through these stages is itself the compulsion for sociality, that is, for the third stage of institutions. Institutions must be universal (saarvabhaum). A universal social institution is simply the system of following realities based on humaneness. The absence of harmony (taartamyata) between the ownership of the system and its operational field is the defeat (parabhāv) of the system. There is no possibility of defeat in the programs of universal institutions. For humanity, humaneness itself is prosperity

(vaibhav).

Therefore, unambiguity (asandigdhatā) in the law (vidhi) and policy code (neeti-sanhita) of human life is completeness in education (shiksha). The success of the system is evident through the harmony found in the population within its operational field, which is the manifest form of unambiguity. The law code is the human-life code. This is the linguistic codification (bhaashaakaran sanhita) of nature's evolutionary order, development, awakening order, and awakening. Its imitation (anukaran), following (anusaran), and conduct process (aacharan-prakriya) is policy. This is the program of human life.

Law based on territorial and class limits, that is, the crime code (aparaadh-sanhita) and its interpretation, cannot be universal. Due to this, the need has arisen to transition into the universal life-order and life's programs. All applications (prayukti) of utility and beauty values are in behaviour. Therefore, all applications are for living or for life. Prosperity (samriddhi) for the body (shareer), resolution (samaadhaan), and realisation (anubhooti) for life are necessary and inevitable.

This aspiration represents the deepest purpose of co-existential living, encompassing auspiciousness (maangalya), goodness (shubh), harmony (sangeet), desirable necessity (vaanchaneey anivaaryata), historical achievement (aitihaasik upalabdhi), ordained order (niyatikram sthiti), integrity (akhandta), fearlessness (abhayata), vigilance (satarkata), and the experience of paradise (svarg) on earth. In the tradition of an undivided society, courtesies remain dedicated to the fulfilment of established values, and the proper use of wealth finds fulfilment in humaneness, which is the pleasant state (sukhad sthiti) found in awakening (jaagrti) to co-existential reality. This is because sociality (saamaajikta) exists in the cycle of awakened consciousness (devpad-chakra). In contrast, it does not exist in the cycle of delusion (bhraantipad-chakra), in which individuals perceive themselves as fundamentally separate from one another.

The Unchangeable Nature of Co-Existential Values

The possibility of diversity (vaividhyata) in courtesy depends on country and time (desh-kaalavash), allowing for cultural variations in the expression of co-existential principles. However, there is no alternative (vikalp) in the proper use of wealth and in established values themselves, as these reflect the fundamental structure of co-existence. This is the fundamental fact (mool tathya) of integrity and inviolability in co-existential philosophy. Animated (anupraanit) by this understanding, life experiences daily programs (nitya-kaaryakram), celebrations (utsav), prosperity (samriddhi), resolution (samaadhaan), enthusiasm (utsaah), success (saphalata), stability (sthirata), peace (shaant), contentment (santosh), and happiness (sukh). This aspiration has existed in humanity from time immemorial (anant kaal), reflecting the eternal nature of co-existential reality regardless of whether humans have been fully conscious of it.

The Eight Foundations of Co-Existential Integrity

Co-existentialism establishes integrity (akhandta) in human beings through eight foundational recognitions, for which there is complete possibility (poorn sambhaavana) and necessity (aavashyakta). First, humans are born with relationships (sambandh), not as isolated atoms but as inherently connected beings. Second, established relationships contain established values, meaning that the structure of co-existence itself determines the values necessary for its functioning. Third, social values are unchangeable (aparivartaneey) because they reflect the unchangeable reality of human interconnectedness. Fourth, the proper use (sadupyog) and security (suraksha) of wealth are proven only through humaneness, as material resources serve the purpose of co-existence rather than individual accumulation. Fifth, this is validated (pramaanit) only in humaneness within the awakened human tradition (jaagrit maanav parampara) that recognises co-existential reality. Sixth, the awakened (jaagrit) human being is a social-justice unit (saamaajik-nyayik ikaai), simultaneously individual and inherently connected. Seventh, the application (prayukti) of courtesy and goods and

services (vastu va seva) is successful in, from, and for social values, meaning that all human activities find their purpose in supporting co-existence. Eighth, in humans, natural expression (svabhaav sahaaj abhivyakti), fulfilment of dharma (dharm sampannata), and experience (anubhooti) are well-established (prasiddh), indicating that co-existential living is the natural state of human beings when not obscured by delusion.

Service (seva) in this context means necessary assistance in mutuality (parasparata), complementarity (poorakta) done with body, mind, and wealth (tan man dhan)—complementary activities (poorak kriyaakalaap) done with commitment (pratibaddhata) in, from, and for definite cooperative processes. Application (prayukti) means dedication (arpan-samarpan) and offering of body, mind, and wealth in the sense of use (upyog), proper use (sadupyog), and purpose (prayojansheelta)—planning (niyojan) with enlightenment (prabuddhataa).

Co-existential philosophy recognises a hierarchical structure of values that operate at different levels of human experience, where the greater values (guru moolya) contain the lesser values (laghu moolya). In this hierarchy, complete value (poorn moolya) contains established values (sthaapit moolya), established values contain courteous values (shishth moolya), and courteous values contain production values (utpaadan moolya). This nested structure reveals that truth is love, love is complete, complete is experience, and experience is truth. Therefore, in complete value, established values are dedicated; in established values, courteous values are dedicated; and in courteous values, production values are dedicated.

Social values (saamaajik moolya) are unchangeable (aparivartaneey), representing life values (jeevan moolya) and human values (maanav moolya) based on established values that reflect the fundamental structure of co-existence. The total of established values and courteous values constitutes social valuedness (saamaajik moolyavatta), which forms the basis for culture (sanskriti), civilisation (sabhyata), law (vidhi), and order (vyavastha). Culture represents society's capacity to accept (sveekar

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kshamata) social values, while civilisation represents society's capacity to carry forward (vahan kshamata) these social values.

Courteous values (shishth moolya) are definite (nishchit), providing clear guidelines for behaviour that expresses co-existential awareness. For material objects (bhautik vastuen), there are two types of production values: utility value (upyogita moolya) and beauty value or art value (kala moolya or sundarta moolya). Both utility and beauty values are contained within or dedicated to social values, and their application (prayukti) is in behaviour (vyavahaar). Utility value contains beauty, and beauty value contains utility, demonstrating their mutual interdependence. The application of these values lies within the limits of the dual aspirations (aakaankshaadvaya) of human life.

The complete set of values (moolya-samuchchaya) consists of: complete value (poorn moolya), established values (sthaapit moolya), courteous values (shishth moolya), utility values (upyogita moolya), and beauty values (sundarta moolya). There is no experience beyond these values in, from, and for humanity because they comprehensively address the spiritual (aadhyaatmik), intellectual (bauddhik), and material (bhautik) dimensions of co-existential living. Social values are evident in experience (anubhav), courteous values in behaviour (vyavahaar), and material values in production and utility (utpaadan-upyogita), together forming a complete framework for human life.

Resolution and Experience in Co-Existential Life

The non-contradiction (nirvirodhataa) of behaviour and experience is resolution (samaadhaan), which represents the achievement of internal and external alignment within co-existential living. This clarifies resolutionary materialism (samaadhaanaatmak bhautikvaad), showing that behaviour is based on experience, and production, use, proper use, purposefulness, and distribution (vitaran) are based on resolution. This is society (samaaj) and sociality (saamaajikta) properly understood.

Experience in co-existentialism is unchangeable (aparivartaneey)

because it represents direct realisation of co-existential reality. If there is change (parivartan), then it is not true experience (anubhav) but only appearance (bhaas), semblance (aabhaas), and perception (prateeti) toward experience. The totality of values exists only as experience (anubhav). Experience is the only truth (satya), truth is complete value (poorn moolya), complete value is love (prem), love is bliss (aanand), and bliss is experience. The manifest form of this is alertness (sajagta), which is the desired state (abhishttha) of humanity. Knowledge is love and love is knowledge (gyaan hi prem aur prem hi gyaan). Love is free from more and less, and the realisation of knowledge is love, while the basis of love is knowledge. This is the main characteristic of completeness (poornataa). Established values are the states of love itself, and all established values are permeated (ot-prot) in, from, and for love, whose truth is stable and unchanging across all three times (trikaalaabaadh).

True co-existential experience is the direct knowing of interconnectedness and the established values that flow from it. In complete value (poorn moolya), life and life's programs become clear. At the root of established values, complete value is the only basis. Inert-conscious nature (jad-chaitanyaatmak prakriti) exists only in existence (satta) itself.

In co-existential living, hopes (aashayen) find restraint and fulfilment in needs (aavashyaktayen), and needs in necessity (anivaaryata), creating a hierarchy of values. Utility-value (upyogita-moolya) exists within necessity, necessity-value (aavashyakta-moolya) within courtesy (shishthata), courtesy-value (shishthata-moolya) within established values, established values (sthaapit moolya) within human values (maanav moolya), and human values are found dedicated (samarpit) in life values (jeevan moolya). Similarly, the produced object value (utpadit vastu moolya) is committed to courteous value, courteous value to established value, established value to human value, and human value is validated through integration into life value. This hierarchy reveals the purpose of co-existentialism, showing that material

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concerns are nested within social problems, which in turn are nested within the ultimate values of life itself.

The proper use (sadupyog) of produced object values is proven only in conjunction with courteous values and social values. Social values mean that courteous values are found present in the established values in every relationship, and this is awakening (jaagrti). The dignity and glory (garima-mahima) of courteous values are significant only in, from, and for social values. Without social values, the practical interpretation (vyavahaarik meemaamsaa) of courteous values cannot be proven. Rather, the value (moolyavattaa) and significance (mahattaa) of courteous values become clear only by following (anugamansheelta) the established values. Therefore, it is inevitable (avashyambhaavi) that courteous values be dedicated to established values, and that humans fulfil them through humaneness (maanaveeyata).

The Purpose and Programs of Co-Existential Living

The fulfilment of resolutionary materialist programs (samaadhaanaatmak bhautikvadi kaaryakram) is proposed in the form of production beyond necessity (aavashyakta se adhik utpaadan). For this purpose, education (shiksha), educational capacity (nipunta), and skill (kushalta) exist in human beings as production capacity (utpaadan kshamata). This capacity replaces utility and art value upon natural prosperity (praakritik aishvarya).

The fundamental elements of practical Just life (vyavahaaratmak janavadeey jeevan) are life values, human values, established values, and courteous values. This courtesy has been proven restrained through humaneness. Production values are dedicated to these courteous values, because without courteous values, the restraint and proper use of produced object values cannot be proven. The participation of more and more individuals in agricultural and industrial work, based on resolutionary materialist principles, becomes evident through the abundance of production and fulfilment. The consumerist, materialist, trade-based system of production and distribution ultimately proves unsuccessful because

the control and regulation (nīyantran) of use and proper use succeed only through humaneness and the three-fold system of law (nīyamatray paddhatee).

The purpose of co-existentialism, therefore, is the realisation of human integrity through the recognition and practice of established values in all dimensions of life. It seeks to create conditions where human beings can experience the fullness of their interconnected nature, moving from the delusion (bhraanti) of separation to the awakened state (jaagrti) of recognised co-existence. This is achieved through the cultivation of the nine established values, their expression through courtesy, the proper use of material resources, and the establishment of justice at all levels of human organisation, from the individual to the international.

Co-existentialism ultimately presents a comprehensive philosophy where human integrity arises from unchangeable social values expressed through courtesy, supported by the proper use of material resources, and unified through justice at all levels of human organisation. It emphasises that while production and material prosperity are important, they serve the deeper purpose of supporting co-existential relationships rather than existing as ends in themselves. True human fulfilment comes through the realisation and practice of eternal values that reflect the fundamental interconnected nature of human existence, transforming society from a collection of competing individuals into an undivided whole (akhand samaaj) in which each person's well-being is inseparable from the well-being of all.

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Chapter 6: The Epistemology and Ontology of Co-Existence

The previous chapters established the core principles of Madhyasth Darshan and explored its ontological claims about existence as co-existence. This final chapter of Part II examines the epistemological foundations of Nagraj's philosophy—how we can know co-existential reality, what the structure of that knowledge is, and how it relates to both scientific and spiritual understanding. Epistemology—the theory of knowledge—is crucial for any philosophical system. It is not enough to make claims about reality; one must also explain how those claims can be known and justified. Western philosophy has struggled with epistemological problems since Descartes, generating numerous theories that often deepen rather than resolve difficulties. Madhyasth Darshan offers a distinctive epistemological approach grounded in its co-existential ontology (Nagraj, 2015).

This chapter explores three interconnected topics: the concept of direct realisation (*anubhav*) as the foundation of knowledge; the triadic structure of reality as *Jeevan* (life-energy), *Chetan* (consciousness-body), and *Vishva* (universe); and the reconciliation of scientific and spiritual understanding within a unified framework. Together, these topics constitute Madhyasth Darshan's answer to the question: How can we know truth, and what is the structure of that truth?

6.1 Knowing Through Direct Perception & Realisation

The term *anubhav* is central to Madhyasth Darshan's epistemology. It is often translated as "experience," "realisation," or "direct perception," though none of these English terms fully captures its meaning. *Anubhav* refers to immediate, non-conceptual awareness of reality—knowledge that arises not through inference or testimony

but through direct encounter with what is (Nagraj, 2015).

6.1.1 Anubhav as Foundation: For Nagraj, *anubhav* is the ultimate ground of all knowledge. Other sources of knowledge—perception, inference, testimony, reasoning—are valid but derivative. They depend on and point back to direct experience. We trust perception because we directly experience perceiving. We accept inference because we directly experience the connection between premises and conclusions. We believe testimony because we directly experience understanding what others communicate (Gaur, 2008).

This might seem to make Madhyasth Darshan a form of empiricism—the view that all knowledge comes from sensory experience. But Nagraj's conception of *anubhav* is broader than sensory perception. It includes sensory expertise but is not limited to it. We can have *anubhav* of mathematical truths (directly seeing that $2+2=4$), moral truths (directly recognising that gratuitous cruelty is wrong), and metaphysical truths (directly realising co-existential nature) (Nagraj, 2015).

The key is directness—*anubhav* is non-mediated awareness. When I see a tree, my awareness of it is direct (though the causal process involves light, the eyes, and neural processing). When I understand a mathematical proof, my grasp of its validity is direct (though it required learning mathematics). When I realise co-existential reality, that realisation is direct (though it may follow years of study and contemplation). In each case, there is a moment of immediate knowing that cannot be reduced to anything more basic (Nagraj, 2015).

6.1.2 Anubhav and Language: An essential feature of *anubhav* is that it precedes and exceeds language. We can have direct awareness of things we cannot fully articulate. A musician hears harmonies they cannot yet name; a scientist recognises patterns before formulating equations; a mystic experiences unity before finding words for it. Language is essential for communicating and elaborating our realisations, but the realisations themselves are not linguistic (Nagraj, 2015).

This creates both opportunities and challenges. The opportunity is that *Anubhav* is universally accessible—it does not require sophisticated vocabulary or extensive education. Anyone capable of awareness can potentially realise truth directly. The challenge is that *anubhav* cannot be transmitted through words. A teacher can point, suggest, and guide, but cannot make the student see. Each person must have their own realisation (Nagraj, 2015).

This echoes the Buddhist distinction between conceptual knowledge (*prajñapti*) and direct insight (*prajna*), as well as the Zen emphasis on sudden awakening that transcends words. It also parallels Western phenomenology's concern with direct experience before conceptual categorisation. Across traditions, there is recognition that some truths must be realised experientially, not merely learned intellectually (Husserl, trans. 1970; Suzuki, 1964).

6.1.3 Types of Anubhav: Nagraj distinguishes between different levels or types of *anubhav*. Sensory *anubhav* is awareness through the sense organs—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling. This is the most obvious form of direct experience and the foundation of empirical knowledge. We know the sky is blue because we see it; we know coffee is bitter because we taste it (Nagraj, 2015).

Beyond sensory experience is mental *anubhav*—direct awareness of our own thoughts, feelings, intentions, and understandings. This is what Descartes pointed to with "I think, therefore I am." We are immediately aware of our own mental states, whereas we are not aware of others' mental states or external objects. This introspective awareness is another form of *anubhav*.

Most significant for Madhyasth Darshan is what we might call existential or ontological *anubhav*—direct realisation of the nature of existence itself. This is the realisation Nagraj claims to have had, and claims is available to others who engage in sustained contemplation. It is awareness not of particular objects or mental states but of the fundamental structure and character of reality as such (Nagraj, 2015).

This existential *anubhav* is not mystical in the sense of contradicting

reason or being incommunicable. Nagraj spent decades articulating his realisation in systematic philosophical form. But it is experiential rather than merely theoretical—one can study the concept of Madhyasth Darshan conceptually without having the realisation it describes, just as one can study descriptions of music without hearing it. The concepts point toward a realisation that must ultimately be direct (Nagraj, 2015).

6.1.4 Validation and Objectivity: A crucial question for any epistemology based on direct experience is: How do we distinguish genuine realisation from illusion, true *anubhav* from mere subjective feeling? This is the problem of validation. If each person's experience is authoritative, how do we adjudicate between conflicting experiences?

Nagraj's answer has several dimensions. First, genuine *anubhav* is self-validating in the moment of realisation—it carries its own certainty. When you directly see a tree, you do not need additional evidence that you are seeing a tree. The seeing itself is evidence. Similarly, when one realises co-existential reality, the realisation itself is its own validation (Nagraj, 2015).

However, this does not mean all claimed realisations are equally valid. False *anubhav* can be identified by its consequences. Illusions lead to unsuccessful action, contradictions, and suffering. If I hallucinate a tree where there is none, I will collide with the wall when I try to walk toward it. If I wrongly believe I am separate from others, I will experience conflict and alienation. True *anubhav* leads to successful action, coherence, and fulfilment (Nagraj, 2015).

Furthermore, genuine *anubhav* is potentially universal—anyone who looks properly can see what is actually there. While individual experiences differ in detail, fundamental truths can be realised by multiple observers. If only one person claims to see something that no one else can ever perceive, we have reason to doubt the validity of that experience. Nagraj claims that co-existential reality is available to anyone who engages in sustained, disciplined observation and contemplation (Nagraj, 2015).

This combines elements of foundationalism (some experiences are directly certain) and coherentism (experiences are validated by their consistency with other experiences and their practical consequences). It also suggests a pragmatic criterion—true beliefs work while false ones fail. This multi-faceted approach to validation addresses standard epistemological concerns while grounding knowledge in direct experience (James, 1907).

6.1.5 The Role of Practice: For Nagraj, developing the capacity for true *anubhav* requires practice—what might be called epistemological discipline. Just as one must train to see things through a microscope or to hear subtle musical patterns, one must cultivate the ability to perceive co-existential reality clearly. This cultivation involves several dimensions (Nagraj, 2015).

First, intellectual study provides conceptual frameworks that orient attention. Reading and discussing Madhyasth Darshan gives one ideas about what to look for in one's own experience. This is the role of *gyan*—information that prepares for realisation.

Second, contemplation and reflection allow those concepts to mature into understanding. One sits with the ideas, considers them in relation to one's experience, and tests them against reality. This is the transition from *gyan* to *bodh*—from information to insight.

Third, living according to one's developing understanding reinforces and clarifies it. This is *vyavahar*—conduct that expresses and deepens realisation. When one attempts to live coexistentially, one discovers, through practice, what that means concretely. Experience teaches lessons that mere theory cannot (Nagraj, 2015).

This emphasis on practice reflects Indian philosophical tradition's conviction that truth must be realised, not merely believed. It also parallels contemporary embodied and enactive approaches to cognition, which emphasise that knowing emerges from engaged action in the world rather than from passive observation (Varela et al., 1991).

6.2 The Triadic Structure: Jeevan, Chetan, and

Vishva-Vyavastha

Beyond its epistemological claims, Madhyasth Darshan offers a distinctive account of reality's structure. Nagraj proposes that existence manifests in a triadic pattern: *Jeevan* (life-energy or animating principle), *Chetan* (the conscious body or physical-energetic system), and *Vishva* or *prakriti* (the material universe). Understanding this triadic structure is crucial for grasping how Madhyasth Darshan resolves traditional philosophical problems about mind, body, and world (Nagraj, 2015).

6.2.1 Jeevan: The Life Principle: The term *Jeevan* is often translated as "life" or "soul," but Nagraj uses it in a specific technical sense. *Jeevan* is the animating energy or consciousness principle that makes living beings alive and aware. It is not a substance separate from the body (as in Cartesian dualism) but rather the organisational pattern or dynamic principle that distinguishes living, conscious beings from mere matter (Nagraj, 2008, P.11).

Think of *Jeevan* as analogous to a program running on a computer. The program is not a separate substance from the hardware—it is a pattern of organisation within the hardware. Yet the program has properties distinct from the hardware itself. You can understand the hardware by studying electronics and physics, but to understand what the program does, you need different concepts. Similarly, *Jeevan* is not separate from the physical body but possesses distinctive properties that cannot be reduced to purely material descriptions (Nagraj, 2008, p. 12).

However, unlike a computer program (which is ultimately reducible to physical states), Nagraj understands *Jeevan* as having an irreducible reality. It is not merely an epiphenomenon or emergent property that could in principle be explained away. Rather, *Jeevan* is a fundamental aspect of existence—the conscious, self-aware dimension that exists alongside and in relationship with the material dimension (Nagraj, 2008, P.13).

Jeevan is what seeks fulfilment, what desires happiness, what suffers from confusion and experiences liberation through

understanding. It is the subject of experience, the "I" that knows and acts. Yet crucially, *Jeevan* exists only in relationship to the body and the world. No disembodied *Jeevan* is floating free—life requires a living body and an environment. This avoids the problems of substance dualism while acknowledging the irreducibility of conscious experience (Nagraj, 2008, P.13).

6.2.2 Chetan: The Conscious Body: The term *Chetan* literally means "conscious" or "animate," but Nagraj uses it to refer to the physical-energetic body that *Jeevan* animates and through which it acts. The body (*sharir*) is material—composed of atoms and molecules, following physical and biological laws. But when animated by *Jeevan*, it becomes *Chetan*—a conscious, living system capable of perception, action, and development (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

The *Chetan* includes both the gross physical body and subtle energy systems. It encompasses not just bones, organs, and tissues but also the nervous system /through which consciousness operates, the endocrine system that influences mood and behaviour, and what some traditions call the energy body or pranic system. All of these are material in the sense that they are part of the natural order, yet they are specifically organised to support conscious life (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

Importantly, the *Chetan* is not merely a vessel or prison for *Jeevan* (as in some dualistic views). Rather, it is the necessary medium through which *Jeevan* exists and acts in the world. Without the body, there is no individual conscious experience. Without *Jeevan* animating it, the body is a mere corpse. The two are interdependent—neither can exist or function without the other. This interdependence is a specific instance of the general principle of coexistence (Nagraj, 2008, p. 16).

Chetan also develops over time. Through nutrition, exercise, education, and practice, the body-mind system can become more capable, refined, and sensitive. This development is not automatic but requires conscious effort guided by understanding. The quality

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of one's *Chetan*—its health, sensitivity, and capacities—both enables and reflects the development of *Jeevan*. Mind and body are not separate but different aspects of a unified system (Nagraj, 2008; Damasio, 1994).

6.2.3 Vishva/Prakriti: The Material Universe: The third element in the triad is *Vishva* (universe) or *prakriti* (nature)—the entire material order within which living beings exist. This includes not just the immediate environment but the cosmos as a whole—from subatomic particles to galaxies, from the air we breathe to the most distant stars. Everything that exists materially is part of *Vishva* (Nagraj, 2015, P.6).

Vishva is not inert or meaningless. It has structure, order, and what we might call intelligence (though not consciousness in the sense of subjective awareness). The laws of physics, the periodic table of elements, the patterns of chemistry and biology—all manifest the inherent order of *Vishva*. This order makes life possible. Only in a structured, lawful universe can complex organisms evolve and thrive (Nagraj, 2015, P.8).

Furthermore, *Vishva* is the ultimate source and support of all living beings. Our bodies are made of materials from the earth—carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and minerals. We are sustained by food grown in soil, by water from the hydrological cycle, and by oxygen produced by plants. When we die, our bodies return to the earth, their materials recycled into new forms. We are not separate from *Vishva* but are temporary, conscious organisations within it (Nagraj, 2015, p. 9; Capra, 1996).

Yet *Vishva* is not conscious. Planets orbit stars, rivers flow to the sea, atoms bond into molecules—all without awareness or intention. The material order operates according to its nature, following patterns we describe as natural laws. Consciousness appears only in living beings, specifically those with complex nervous systems capable of supporting subjective experience. *Vishva* provides the stage and materials for life, but life itself—and especially conscious life—represents something genuinely new (Nagraj, 2015, P.9).

6.2.4 Triadic Relationships: The crucial insight is that *Jeevan*, *Chetan*, and *Vishva* are not three separate substances but three interdependent aspects of a unified reality. *Jeevan* exists through *Chetan*, *Chetan* is composed of and sustained by *Vishva*, and *Vishva* is known and engaged by *Jeevan* through *Chetan*. Each is necessary; none is reducible to the others; all co-exist in a dynamic relationship (Nagraj, 2015).

This triadic structure resolves several classical philosophical problems. The mind-body problem (How can mind and body interact if they are different substances?) dissolves because *Jeevan* and *Chetan* are not separate substances but interdependent aspects of living beings. The problem of knowledge (How can the mind know external reality?) dissolves because knowing is not a connection across a gap but a relationship within co-existence. The problem of values (How can we derive ought from is?) dissolves because values arise from *Jeevan's* nature and its relationship to the larger whole (Nagraj, 2015).

Moreover, this structure allows for both material and conscious dimensions without reducing either to the other. Against materialism, Nagraj affirms that consciousness (*Jeevan*) is irreducible and fundamental. Against idealism, he affirms that matter (*Vishva*) is real and not merely an appearance. Against dualism, he insists that these dimensions exist in relationship, not opposition. This is neither monism (all is one) nor dualism (reality is divided) but what we might call "relational pluralism"—diversity in unity, distinction in connection (Nagraj, 2015).

6.2.5 Human Existence in the Triadic Structure: For human beings specifically, the triadic structure has special significance. We are *Jeevan* (conscious subjects) embodied in *Chetan* (human bodies) existing within *Vishva* (the natural and social world). Our fulfilment depends on the right relationship among these three dimensions (Nagraj, 2015).

Physical health requires proper care of *Chetan*—nutrition, exercise, rest, and protection from harm. Psychological health requires the

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development of *Jeevan*—education, understanding, emotional maturity, and moral development. Ecological health requires a harmonious relationship with *Vishva*—sustainable use of resources, respect for natural systems, recognition of interdependence. A fully healthy and fulfilled human life integrates all three dimensions (Nagraj, 2015).

Many contemporary problems arise from the fragmentation of these dimensions. We treat bodies as machines (ignoring *Jeevan*), pursue mental development while neglecting physical health (separating *Jeevan* from *Chetan*), or exploit nature while forgetting our dependence on it (disconnecting from *Vishva*). Madhyasth Darshan calls for reintegration—understanding ourselves as unified beings embedded in and dependent on the larger natural order (Nagraj, 2015).

6.3 Science and Spirituality Reconciled

One of the most ambitious claims of Madhyasth Darshan is that it reconciles scientific and spiritual understanding within a unified framework. This reconciliation is not a compromise that weakens both science and spirituality but rather a synthesis that fulfils the truth in each while transcending their apparent opposition (Nagraj, 2015).

6.3.1 The Apparent Conflict: Modern Western culture has assumed mainly that science and spirituality are incompatible or at least operate in separate domains. Science deals with objective facts, spirituality with subjective values. Science studies the material world, spirituality the realm of meaning and purpose. Science progresses through empirical investigation, spirituality through faith or mystical experience. This separation—sometimes called the "two cultures" problem—fragmented human understanding and created the sense that we must choose between scientific rationality and spiritual meaning (Snow, 1959).

This conflict is relatively recent in human history. Ancient and medieval thinkers did not experience such a stark division. Natural philosophy (what we call science) was continuous with metaphysics

and theology. The investigation of nature was considered a path to understanding the divine. Only with the scientific revolution and Enlightenment did science and religion begin to separate into distinct, often antagonistic domains (Tarnas, 1993).

Some have argued this separation is necessary and beneficial—science should not be constrained by religious dogma, and religion should not make empirical claims that conflict with scientific evidence. Others lament the fragmentation and seek to reunify scientific and spiritual understanding. Madhyasth Darshan belongs to this second camp, but its approach is distinctive (Gould, 2015; Nagraj, 2015).

6.3.2 Science as Knowledge of Vishva: For Nagraj, science is primarily the systematic study of *Vishva*—the material order with its structures, processes, and laws. Physics investigates the fundamental constituents and forces of matter. Chemistry studies how atoms combine and interact. Biology examines living systems and their evolution. Astronomy explores the cosmos on large scales. All these scientific disciplines reveal aspects of *Vishva*'s nature (Nagraj, 2015).

Science has been remarkably successful in understanding the material world. We can predict planetary motions, cure diseases, build complex technologies, and manipulate matter at the atomic scale. This success demonstrates that science is onto something real—it is not mere social construction or arbitrary convention but genuine knowledge of actual structures and patterns in *Vishva* (Gaur, 2008).

However, science as typically practised is limited in two ways. First, it focuses on third-person, objective knowledge—what can be measured, quantified, and publicly verified. This is appropriate for studying material systems but inadequate for understanding first-person consciousness—the subjective experience of *Jeevan*. Second, science often adopts a reductionist methodology, explaining complex phenomena in terms of simpler components. This works well for many purposes but can miss emergent properties

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and holistic patterns (Nagel, 1974; Nagraj, 2015).

Nagraj does not reject science or claim it is fundamentally mistaken. Rather, he argues it is incomplete. Science reveals truths about *Vishva*, but needs to be complemented by an understanding of *Jeevan* and their relationship. A complete understanding integrates scientific knowledge with wisdom about consciousness, value, and purpose (Nagraj, 2015).

6.3.3 Spirituality as Understanding of Jeevan: Spiritual traditions, in Nagraj's view, primarily concern *Jeevan*—consciousness, meaning, purpose, and fulfilment. They ask questions science does not address: What is the nature of subjective experience? What makes life meaningful? How should we live? What is lasting happiness? These questions cannot be answered through scientific investigation alone because they concern the first-person dimension of existence (Nagraj, 2015).

Traditional spirituality has generated valuable insights—meditation practices that transform consciousness, ethical teachings that guide conduct, and contemplative wisdom about human nature and fulfilment. These represent accumulated understanding from millennia of human reflection and practice. They should not be dismissed as mere superstition or wish-fulfilment (Gaur, 2008).

However, spirituality has its own limitations. When spiritual traditions make empirical claims about the material world—the age of the universe, the biological origins of life, the causes of disease—they often conflict with scientific evidence. When they rely on dogma, authority, or unquestioned tradition rather than investigation and reasoning, they can perpetuate errors and resist correction. When they withdraw from the world into purely transcendent concerns, they may neglect material needs and social responsibilities (Nagraj, 2015).

Just as science needs to be complemented by an understanding of consciousness and value, spirituality needs to be grounded in accurate knowledge of the material world and subjected to the disciplines of reasoning and evidence. Neither science nor

spirituality alone is adequate; both are necessary.

6.3.4 Madhyasth Darshan as Integration: Madhyasth Darshan proposes to integrate scientific and spiritual understanding through its co-existential framework. The triadic structure of *Jeevan*, *Chetan*, and *Vishva* provides a conceptual scheme that accommodates both material and conscious dimensions of reality. Science investigates *Vishva* and the material aspects of *Chetan*. Spirituality explores *Jeevan* and its potential for development and fulfilment. Together, they provide a comprehensive understanding (Nagraj, 2015), Vigyan.

This integration is possible because co-existential ontology does not privilege either matter or consciousness as more fundamental. Both are real; neither reduces to the other; they exist in a relationship. This avoids the materialist tendency to dismiss consciousness as epiphenomenal and the idealist tendency to dismiss matter as illusory. It creates space for scientific investigation of the material world and spiritual cultivation of consciousness without requiring either to usurp the other's domain (Nagraj, 2015).

Moreover, Madhyasth Darshan insists that true understanding must be validated by *anubhav*—direct realisation. This applies to both scientific and spiritual claims. Scientific theories must be tested against empirical observation. Spiritual teachings must be verified in lived experience. Claims accepted purely on authority or tradition, whether scientific or spiritual, are inadequate. This shared emphasis on experiential validation creates common ground between scientific and spiritual inquiry (Nagraj, 2015).

6.3.5 Practical Implications: The reconciliation of science and spirituality has practical consequences. In education, it suggests we should not separate scientific and humanistic learning into isolated disciplines but show how they complement and enrich one another. In ethics, it suggests we need both scientific understanding of consequences (ecological impact, social effects) and spiritual wisdom about values and purpose (Gaur, 2008).

In approaching contemporary challenges—environmental crisis,

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social inequality, technological disruption, meaning and purpose in modern life—we need both scientific analysis and spiritual vision. Science can tell us how climate systems work and what interventions might slow warming, but we need spiritual understanding to motivate care for future generations and other species. Spirituality can inspire us with visions of justice and fulfilment, but we need scientific knowledge to implement those visions effectively (Nagraj, 2015, 2003).

Furthermore, the integration of science and spirituality points toward new forms of inquiry. Contemplative neuroscience studies how meditation affects the brain. Ecological philosophy integrates scientific ecology with ethical reflection on human-nature relationships. Positive psychology investigates well-being scientifically while drawing on wisdom traditions. These hybrid approaches represent the kind of integration Madhyasth Darshan advocates (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Naess, 1989; Seligman, 2011).

Remaining Challenges: While Madhyasth Darshan offers a promising framework for reconciling science and spirituality, significant challenges remain. The detailed integration of scientific findings with co-existential philosophy requires ongoing work. How exactly does neuroscience relate to the concept of *Jeevan*? How does evolutionary biology fit with the four orders of nature? How do quantum mechanics and relativity relate to co-existential ontology? These questions require engagement between Madhyasth Darshan scholars and working scientists (Nagraj, 2015).

Moreover, the institutional and cultural separation of scientific and spiritual communities makes practical integration difficult. Scientists often dismiss philosophy and spirituality as unscientific speculation. Spiritual practitioners sometimes resist scientific investigation of consciousness, viewing it as reductive or materialistic. Building bridges requires openness on both sides—scientists willing to take consciousness seriously as irreducible, spiritual practitioners willing to subject their claims to rigorous investigation (Nagraj, 2015).

Nevertheless, the attempt at integration is worthwhile. If Nagraj is correct that reality has both material and conscious dimensions that coexist in relationship, then an adequate understanding requires integrating scientific and spiritual insights. The alternative—continued fragmentation—leaves us with partial knowledge that cannot address our deepest questions or guide us toward genuine fulfilment (Nagraj, 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the epistemological and ontological foundations of Madhyasth Darshan, examining how we can know co-existential reality and what its structure is. Three key insights emerged: the concept of *anubhav* (direct realisation) as the foundation of knowledge; the triadic structure of *Jeevan* (consciousness), *Chetan* (conscious body), and *Vishva* (material universe); and the reconciliation of scientific and spiritual understanding within a unified co-existential framework. These epistemological and ontological principles complete our initial exploration of Madhyasth Darshan. We have now examined its historical context (Chapter 4), core principles (Chapter 5), and foundational claims about knowledge and reality (Chapter 6). Together, these three chapters constitute Part II of this work, introducing Madhyasth Darshan as a contemporary philosophical system that addresses the fragmentation and dualism diagnosed in Part I.

Madhyasth Darshan represents a significant contribution to human thought. This original synthesis draws on Indian philosophical traditions while engaging with modern concerns, honours both scientific investigation and spiritual wisdom, connects individual transformation with social change, and grounds ethical and political philosophy in a comprehensive understanding of existence as co-existence. The philosophy's ultimate test will be whether it generates the transformations it promises—whether individuals who understand and live according to co-existential principles actually achieve *samadhan*, *samriddhi*, *abhay*, and conscious co-existence; whether societies organised on these principles actually manifest

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greater harmony, justice, and sustainability. These are empirical questions that can only be answered through practice and observation over time.

Yet even before such practical verification, Madhyasth Darshan has theoretical and conceptual value. It offers new ways of thinking about old problems, alternative frameworks for understanding ourselves and our world, and visions of human possibility that challenge our assumptions about what is necessary and what is possible. In an era of fragmentation, conflict, and existential crisis, such alternative visions are precious—not as dogmas to be accepted uncritically but as resources for reimagining human existence.

The journey from Part I's diagnosis of dualistic fragmentation through Part II's exposition of co-existential philosophy points toward the constructive work of applying these insights to concrete challenges. How might co-existential understanding transform education, economics, politics, and social relationships? How might it address environmental crisis, social inequality, and the search for meaning in modern life? These questions await further exploration, but the foundations have been laid.

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Part III: Comparative Perspectives

Chapter 7: Idealism, Materialism, and Madhyasth Darshan - A Comparative Matrix

Introduction

Having explored the limitations of Western dualistic thought (Part I) and the systematic presentation of Madhyasth Darshan (Part II), we now turn to explicit comparison. How does co-existential philosophy relate to the two dominant traditions of Western thought? What are the similarities and differences? What advantages does Madhyasth Darshan claim over Idealism and Materialism, and how well-founded are these claims?

This chapter organises the comparison through a matrix examining five fundamental dimensions: ontology (what is real), epistemology (how we know), ethics (how we should act), social organisation (how we should structure collective life), and economics (how we should organise production and distribution). For each dimension, we will examine the characteristic positions of Idealism and Materialism, then explore how Madhyasth Darshan offers an alternative that claims to transcend rather than merely compromise between these positions (Nagraj, 2015).

The goal is neither to prove Madhyasth Darshan superior through abstract argument nor to claim all views are equally valid relativistically. Instead, we seek to understand the distinct logic of each position, recognise its strengths and limitations, and evaluate whether co-existential philosophy genuinely offers something new or merely recombines existing elements in familiar ways. This requires both sympathetic understanding and critical analysis (Matilal, 1986).

7.1 Ontology: What Is Real?

The most fundamental philosophical question is: What exists? What is the nature of reality? The answer to this question shapes everything else—how we understand knowledge, ethics, society, and our own existence. Idealism, Materialism, and Madhyasth Darshan offer radically different ontological visions.

7.1.1 Idealism: Spirit/Idea as Real

Idealism, in its various forms, holds that mind, spirit, consciousness, or ideas constitute ultimate reality. The physical world is either derivative from mind (as in Berkeley's subjective idealism), a manifestation of Absolute Spirit (as in Hegel), or an illusion obscuring true spiritual reality (as in some interpretations of Advaita Vedanta). What is fundamentally real is not matter but the mental or spiritual (Tarnas, 1991).

This position has several motivations. First, consciousness seems undeniable—even radical scepticism presupposes a doubting mind. Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" establishes consciousness as the most certain reality. Second, matter as we experience it seems to exist only in consciousness—we know material objects only through mental representations. Third, abstract entities such as mathematical truths, logical principles, and values seem real but immaterial, suggesting that reality transcends the physical (Hare, 1982).

Idealism honours the reality of consciousness, meaning, and values. It refuses to reduce mind to matter or to treat subjective experience as merely an epiphenomenon. It preserves space for spirituality, purpose, and transcendence. These are significant strengths (Taylor, 1975).

However, Idealism faces serious problems. How does the mind interact with matter if they are fundamentally different kinds of things? How do individual minds relate to one another if each is its own reality? Why does the physical world exhibit such stubborn regularity if it is merely a mental construct or a spiritual appearance? And does not Idealism's otherworldly focus sometimes lead to

neglect of material conditions, embodied existence, and social justice? (Russell, 1945; Feuerbach, trans. 1957).

7.1.2 Materialism: Matter as Real

Materialism asserts that physical matter and energy are the only fundamental realities. Everything else—consciousness, values, social structures—either reduces to material processes or emerges from material complexity. The universe consists of particles and fields operating according to natural laws. Mind is brain activity; society is economic relations; history is the movement of material forces (Tucker, Marx, and Engels, 1978).

Materialism's motivations are equally strong. Science has been spectacularly successful in explaining natural phenomena through material causes—chemistry, biology, and neuroscience all reveal how complex phenomena emerge from simpler material processes. Invoking immaterial spirits or transcendent ideas seems unnecessary when material explanations suffice. Furthermore, Materialism grounds ethics and politics in actual conditions rather than abstract ideals, potentially enabling more effective social transformation (Singer, 2000).

Materialism takes the physical world seriously, respects scientific investigation, and focuses attention on material conditions that profoundly shape human life. It avoids the otherworldliness that can make Idealism irrelevant to practical concerns. These are genuine advantages (Nagel, 1986).

Yet Materialism has its own difficulties. How does subjective experience—the "what it is like" quality of consciousness—arise from purely physical processes? Why do moral values have normative force if they are merely products of material evolution? Does not reducing all human phenomena to economic relations or brain chemistry impoverish our understanding of meaning, beauty, love, and purpose? And has not materialist politics sometimes produced its own forms of oppression and dehumanisation? (Chalmers, 1996; Arendt, 1951).

7.1.3 Madhyasth Darshan: Co-Existence of Units in Space

Madhyasth Darshan proposes an entirely different ontology. Reality is neither fundamentally mental nor fundamentally material but co-existential. Everything that exists does so in relationship—co-existing with everything else in a unified yet differentiated whole. The fundamental ontological fact is not substance (whether mental or material) but relationship, not being but being-with, not existence but co-existence (*sah-astitva*) (Nagraj, 2015).

More specifically, Nagraj describes reality as "units co-existing in space" (*avkash mein sakaaron ka sah-astitva*). By "units" he means distinct, identifiable entities—atoms, molecules, organisms, persons, planets. By "space" (*avkash*), he means not empty void but the medium or matrix in which units exist and through which they relate. Space is nothing but rather the ever-present, all-pervading condition of existence itself (Nagraj, 2009, P.55).

This formulation avoids both Idealism and Materialism. Against Idealism, it affirms the reality of material units—they are not mere ideas or appearances but actual constituents of existence. Against Materialism, it insists that units are not isolated, mechanically interacting particles but intrinsically related beings participating in a larger whole. Reality is neither one undifferentiated unity (monism) nor a collection of separate substances (atomism) but multiplicity-in-unity, diversity-in-relationship (Nagraj, 2008, P.14).

The key insight is that the relationship is as fundamental as relata. Units and their relationships co-arise—neither exists without the other. An atom exists in relationship to the electromagnetic field and to other atoms. An organism exists in relationship to its environment and to other organisms. A person exists in relationships to family, society, and nature. Remove all relationships, and you have not isolated substance but nothing at all. To be is to be related; existence is co-existence (Nagraj, 2008, P.13; Whitehead, 1929).

This ontology has several advantages. It accommodates both material and conscious dimensions without reducing either to the other—both are real aspects of co-existential reality. It makes the

relationship intrinsic rather than accidental, grounding ethics like existence itself. It resolves the mind-body problem by refusing the premise of fundamental separation. And it provides a framework for understanding both individual distinctness and systemic interdependence (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

However, questions remain. Is co-existence really a distinct ontological position or merely Materialism with emphasis on relationships? Does it adequately account for consciousness, or does it still face the complex problem of explaining subjective experience? Can it provide criteria for distinguishing real relationships from merely conceptual ones? These challenges require ongoing philosophical work (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

7.2 Epistemology: How We Know

Ontological differences generate epistemological ones. What counts as knowledge, how we acquire it, and what validates it differ fundamentally across these three traditions.

7.2.1 Idealism: Intuition/Reason

Idealist epistemology typically privileges reason and intellectual intuition over sensory experience. For Plato, true knowledge comes from rational contemplation of the Forms, not from observing the physical world's shadows. For Descartes, certain knowledge begins with rational self-awareness and proceeds through clear and distinct ideas. For Hegel, knowledge develops through reason's dialectical self-unfolding. Empirical observation may provide information, but genuine understanding requires a rational or intuitive grasp of underlying principles (Hare, 1982; Taylor, 1975).

This epistemology values systematic coherence, logical rigour, and insight into essential natures. It recognises that some truths—mathematical, logical, metaphysical—cannot be empirically verified but are known through reason. It appreciates that understanding requires moving beyond surface appearances to deeper structures. These are important insights (Plato, trans. 1997).

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The limitation is that pure reason can become detached from reality, spinning elaborate systems with no empirical constraint. History is full of rationally coherent but empirically false theories. Moreover, privileging rational insight can lead to elitism—only philosophers or intellectuals can attain truth, while ordinary people remain in ignorance. Finally, reason alone cannot adjudicate between competing rational systems; we need some empirical check on our reasoning (Russell, 1945).

7.2.2 Materialism: Empiricism

Materialist epistemology emphasises empirical investigation—observation, experiment, and inductive reasoning from evidence. Knowledge comes from experiencing the world, not from pure reason or mystical intuition. Science exemplifies this approach: form hypotheses, test them against evidence, and revise theories based on results. Even an understanding of the mind should be based on empirical investigation of the brain and behaviour rather than introspection or rational speculation (Marx, trans. 1978; Singer, 2000).

Empiricism grounds knowledge in publicly accessible evidence rather than private intuition or authority. It provides methods for correcting errors and making progress. It has generated remarkable success in understanding and manipulating the natural world. These achievements demonstrate empiricism's power (Nagel, 1986).

Yet empiricism has limitations. Not everything important is empirically observable—consciousness, values, and mathematical truths resist straightforward empirical investigation. Empiricism risks becoming scientism—the view that only scientific knowledge is genuine knowledge, dismissing other forms of understanding as merely subjective opinion. Moreover, pure empiricism faces philosophical problems (the problem of induction and the theory-ladenness of observation) that suggest that empirical knowledge requires more than just experience (Popper, 1959).

7.2.3 Madhyasth Darshan: Realisation & Understanding (Anubhav & Bodh)

Madhyasth Darshan proposes a distinctive epistemology centred on *anubhav* (direct realisation) and *bodh* (understanding). As explored in Chapter 6, *anubhav* means immediate, non-conceptual awareness of reality. It includes but exceeds both sensory perception and rational intuition. One can have *anubhav* of material objects (through the senses), of mathematical truths (through reason), and of co-existential reality itself (through contemplative realisation) (Nagraj, 2015, p. 45).

Knowledge begins with *anubhav* but matures through *bodh*—the deep understanding that integrates direct experience with conceptual clarity. This is not merely information (*gyan*) but insight that transforms how one sees and lives. *Bodh* cannot be transmitted through words alone; it must arise through each person's own contemplation and practice, though teaching can facilitate this arising (Nagraj, 2015, P.45).

This epistemology combines empirical grounding (knowledge must be verified in experience) with recognition of reason's role (understanding requires conceptual clarity) and emphasis on realisation (truth must be personally realised, not merely believed). It is neither pure empiricism nor pure rationalism, but an integrated approach that honours multiple sources of knowledge (Nagraj, 2015, p. 45).

Furthermore, Madhyasth Darshan insists that genuine knowledge manifests in conduct. Understanding co-existential reality naturally expresses itself in co-existential living. If someone claims to understand but their behaviour contradicts that understanding, their knowledge is incomplete. This pragmatic criterion—truth is what works, what enables fulfilment—provides an additional validation beyond mere logical consistency or empirical adequacy (Nagraj, 2015; James, 1907).

The challenge is whether this epistemology can provide clear criteria for distinguishing genuine *anubhav* from illusion, true *bodh* from mere belief. Nagraj appeals to practical consequences (true

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understanding leads to fulfilment), potential universality (anyone can realise truth), and systematic coherence (genuine insights fit together). Whether these criteria suffice requires testing through practice and dialogue (Batra, 2011).

7.3 Ethics: How We Should Act

Ontological and epistemological differences culminate in ethical ones. What makes actions right or wrong? How should we live? What are our obligations to others?

7.3.1 Idealism: Moral Absolutism

Idealist ethics typically grounds moral truth in transcendent reality. For Plato, right action conforms to the Form of the Good. For religious Idealism, morality derives from divine will. For Kant (whose idealism is complex), moral principles are absolute requirements of pure practical reason. In each case, ethics is objective, universal, and independent of particular circumstances or consequences (Kant, trans. 1996).

This provides ethics with firm foundations and strong normative force. Moral principles are not merely human inventions or social conventions but truths about reality itself. This can motivate self-sacrifice and resistance to injustice—one ought to do right regardless of personal cost or social pressure. Moral absolutism refuses to relativise ethics to individual preferences or cultural customs (Hare, 1982).

However, absolutism faces difficulties. Rigid principles can conflict with one another (what if telling the truth harms an innocent person?). Universal rules may not fit particular contexts adequately. And grounding ethics in transcendent reality disconnects it from human life—why should we care about abstract Forms or divine commands unless they relate to actual human flourishing? (MacIntyre, 1981; Williams, 1985).

7.3.2 Materialism: Relativism

Materialist ethics often tends toward relativism—moral values are

human constructs, products of evolution, culture, or class interests. There are no objective moral truths "out there" to be discovered. Different societies have different values, and there is no transcendent standpoint from which to judge one superior to another. At most, we can analyse the material causes and social functions of moral beliefs (Marx, trans. 1978; Mackie, 1977).

This avoids the problems of absolutism—no need to reconcile conflicting principles or justify transcendent foundations. It takes cultural diversity and historical change in moral beliefs. It can be liberating, freeing people from oppressive moral systems justified by claims to absolute truth (Nietzsche, trans. 1989).

Yet relativism has its own troubles. If all moral values are equally valid (or invalid), on what basis do we criticise injustice? Why should we oppose oppression, exploitation, or cruelty if these are just different cultural practices or expressions of class interests? Relativism risks collapsing into nihilism—nothing really matters, everything is permitted. Even materialists who reject relativism struggle to explain why we should care about justice or compassion if these are merely evolutionary byproducts or ideological constructs (Singer, 1981).

7.3.3 Madhyasth Darshan: Universal Human Conduct (Sarva-Manushya Vyavahar)

Madhyasth Darshan proposes what Nagraj calls *sarva-manushya vyavahar*—universal human conduct or behaviour appropriate for all humans. This is neither absolutism (based on transcendent commands) nor relativism (reducing to cultural convention). Instead, it is conduct that flows naturally from an understanding of co-existential reality (Nagraj, 2015, p. 47).

The key insight is that right action is not obedience to external rules but expression of internal understanding. When one genuinely realises that all beings coexist—that my wellbeing is inseparable from yours, that harming others harms the whole, including myself—certain behaviours naturally follow. Honesty, compassion,

justice, and care for the environment are not arbitrary requirements but intelligent responses to the way things actually are (Gaur, 2008).

This is objective without being absolutist. Ethics is objective because it is grounded in the actual structure of reality—co-existence is a fact, not an opinion. But it is not absolutist because right action depends on context. What honesty requires in one situation differs from another; how we care for children differs from how we care for elders. Universal principles—recognise co-existence, act to sustain rather than undermine it—apply always, but their specific applications vary (Nagraj, 2015).

Moreover, ethics is integrated with fulfilment. Right action is not duty opposed to happiness, but the path to genuine happiness. Acting against co-existential reality generates suffering for oneself and others. Acting in accordance with it generates fulfilment (*samadhan*). Thus, ethics is not a sacrifice of self-interest but realisation of rightly understood self-interest—my genuine interest includes the well-being of the whole (Nagraj, 2015; Aristotle, trans. 2015).

The challenge is whether this approach can provide sufficient practical guidance. How exactly does one determine what co-existence requires in complex situations? When interests genuinely conflict, how do we adjudicate? Can co-existential ethics address questions about abortion, capital punishment, animal rights, and other contentious issues? These questions require detailed ethical reasoning that goes beyond the general framework.

7.4 Society: How We Should Live Together

Ethical theory leads to political philosophy—how should we organise collective life? What social structures support human flourishing?

7.4.1 Idealism: Hierarchical Society

Idealist political philosophy typically envisions hierarchical social organisation. Plato's Republic has philosopher-kings ruling, auxiliaries protecting, and producers working—each class in its

proper place. Medieval Christian society was organised hierarchically—clergy, nobility, commons—reflecting the divine order. Hegel saw the state as a manifestation of rational Spirit, with different classes playing different roles in historical development (Plato, trans. 1997; Hegel, trans. 1991).

This hierarchical vision assumes that people have fundamentally different natures or capacities. Some are suited for contemplation, others for governance, others for labour. Social harmony comes from each fulfilling their proper role under the guidance of those with superior wisdom or virtue. Order, stability, and coordination are valued over equality or individual autonomy (Taylor, 1975).

The strength of this view lies in recognising that people have different talents and that social coordination requires organisation. Anarchy, where everyone does whatever they want, produces chaos. Some structure is necessary (Plato, trans. 1997).

The apparent weakness is that hierarchies typically serve the interests of those at the top while exploiting those at the bottom. Claims of natural inequality have historically justified slavery, caste oppression, patriarchy, and class domination. Who decides who is suited for which role? Those already in power. Hierarchical idealism becomes ideology justifying injustice (Marx, trans. 1978; Rawls, 1971).

7.4.2 Materialism: Conflictual Society

Materialist political philosophy, especially Marxist, understands society as fundamentally conflictual. Classes with opposed material interests struggle for power and resources. History is the history of class struggle—enslaved person against master, serf against lord, proletariat against bourgeoisie. Social harmony is impossible under systems of exploitation; apparent consensus is ideological mystification (Marx & Engels, trans. 1998).

This analysis brilliantly illuminates power dynamics and structural violence. It refuses the idealist fiction that hierarchy serves

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everyone's interests. It recognises that those with power rarely relinquish it voluntarily. Social justice requires struggle and transformation of material conditions, not just moral exhortation or philosophical enlightenment (Singer, 2000).

However, the conflict model has limitations. Does it adequately recognise possibilities for cooperation and mutual benefit? Is all social organisation reducible to class struggle? And historically, revolutionary movements based on conflict models have sometimes reproduced oppression in new forms—the dictatorship of the proletariat became dictatorship over the proletariat (Arendt, 1951; Berlin, 1969).

7.4.3 Madhyasth Darshan: Complementary & Family-Centric Society

Madhyasth Darshan envisions society as organised around complementarity and mutual support, with the family as the basic unit. Different individuals and groups have different roles and capacities, but these differences are complementary rather than hierarchical or conflictual. Social harmony comes from recognising interdependence and organising institutions to support everyone's development and contributions (Nagraj, 2007, p. 113).

The family (*parivar*) is central because it is the first and most basic form of co-existential relationship. In healthy families, members have different roles—parents, children, elders—but these are not hierarchical in the sense of domination. Rather, each contributes according to capacity and receives according to need. Parents care for children not because children are inferior but because children need care. Children respect parents not because of enforced authority but because of genuine gratitude and recognition of their wisdom (Nagraj, 2007, p. 112).

Nagraj proposes extending this family model to larger social units—community (*gram*), region, and ultimately all humanity. Society should be organised so that everyone can achieve *samadhan* (fulfilment), *samriddhi* (prosperity), *abhay* (security), and conscious co-existence. This requires structures that ensure material

sufficiency, support psychological development, provide meaningful work, and enable participation in collective life (Nagraj, 2007, P.98).

This is neither hierarchical (implying domination) nor conflictual (implying opposed interests) but complementary. Different people do different things, but all functions are necessary and valued. Decision-making is through dialogue and consensus rather than domination or voting (which creates winners and losers). Property is primarily for use, not accumulation or exploitation. Exchange is based on trust and mutual benefit, not adversarial negotiation (Nagraj, 2007, P.101).

Critics might object that this vision is utopian—it assumes people will naturally cooperate once they understand co-existence, but what if they do not? It assumes conflicts of interest can always be resolved through dialogue, but what about genuinely incompatible goods? Can family-based organisations scale to large, diverse, modern societies? These are serious questions requiring practical experimentation and theoretical development (Nagraj, 2007, p. 114).

7.5 Economics: How We Should Produce and Distribute

Finally, these philosophical differences manifest in economic organisation—how society produces and distributes material goods.

7.5.1 Idealism: Asceticism

Idealist economics, to the extent it addresses material life at all, tends toward asceticism—minimising material needs and desires. If true reality is spiritual and the physical world is inferior or illusory, then the pursuit of material prosperity is misguided. Wisdom lies in detachment from worldly goods, simple living, and focus on spiritual development. Poverty may even be virtuous if it frees one from material entanglements (Plato, trans. 1997; Augustine, trans. 1961).

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This perspective rightly recognises that endless material accumulation does not bring happiness. It values non-material goods—wisdom, virtue, contemplation—that modern consumer culture neglects. It can foster ecological sustainability through voluntary simplicity (Elgin, 1981).

However, asceticism can become indifference to material suffering. If physical existence is devalued, why alleviate poverty, hunger, or disease? Ascetic ideals have sometimes justified inequality—people with low incomes should accept their lot while the spiritually advanced pursue higher things. Moreover, genuine spiritual practice often requires material support (food, shelter, time for contemplation). Complete asceticism is usually only possible for those whose material needs are met by others' labour (Nagraj, 2009).

7.5.2 Materialism: Consumerism

Materialist economics, especially in its capitalist form, tends toward consumerism—the pursuit of ever-increasing material consumption as the measure of well-being. Since material reality is all there is, happiness must come from satisfying material desires. Economic growth, defined as increased production and consumption, becomes the central social goal. Success is measured by GDP, profit, and individual wealth accumulation (Galbraith, 1958).

This perspective takes material needs seriously and has generated remarkable productivity. Modern capitalism has produced unprecedented material abundance—technology, medicine, consumer goods. Many people today live with comforts unavailable even to kings in earlier eras (Singer, 2000).

Yet consumerism has devastating consequences. Unlimited growth on a finite planet is impossible—the environmental crisis testifies to this. Consumer culture generates artificial needs and restless dissatisfaction—we always want more, never finding lasting fulfilment. Inequality increases as some accumulate vast wealth while others lack basic necessities. And reducing all value to material consumption impoverishes life—relationships, meaning, beauty become commodified (Schumacher, 1973; Jackson, 2009).

7.5.3 Madhyasth Darshan: Avartansheel Arthashastra (Cyclical Prosperity)

Madhyasth Darshan proposes *avartansheel arthashastra*—cyclical economics or the economics of sustainable prosperity. The key insight is that genuine human needs are finite and can be met through appropriate organisation, while resources should cycle rather than being extracted, used once, and discarded (Nagraj, 2001).

Human needs (*avashyakta*) include food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, meaningful work, and opportunity for development. These are real and must be satisfied. But beyond sufficiency, additional material consumption does not increase well-being. A person needs adequate nutrition, comfortable clothing, safe shelter—not infinite quantities of these things. Recognition of this allows for organising production to meet actual needs rather than endlessly stimulating artificial wants (Gaur, 2008).

Resources should cycle, as they do in natural ecosystems. Materials flow from the earth to products for use, then back into the world or into other production. Energy comes from renewable sources. Waste from one process becomes input for another. This cyclical organisation contrasts with the linear "take-make-dispose" industrial economy, which depletes resources and generates pollution (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Nagraj, 2009, p. 51).

Economic activity is primarily for use-value, not exchange-value. Production serves genuine human needs, not profit maximisation. Work is dignified—meaningful participation in meeting collective needs—not exploitation of labour power. Distribution ensures sufficiency for all before allowing surplus for some. Property is primarily for use; excessive accumulation that deprives others is contrary to co-existential principles (Nagraj, 2009, P.18).

This system is neither ascetic (denying material needs) nor consumerist (pursuing endless accumulation). It affirms material life while limiting consumption to what sustains flourishing. It is

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 oriented toward sufficiency and sustainability rather than growth for its own sake. *Samriddhi* (prosperity) means everyone has enough, not anyone having vastly more than they need (Nagraj, 2009, p. 18).

Practical questions arise: How exactly would this system be implemented? What mechanisms would ensure fair distribution without oppressive central control? How would it handle innovation and technological development? What about individual entrepreneurship and creativity? These questions require detailed economic analysis and practical experimentation beyond the scope of philosophical exposition (Nagraj, 2009, P.19).

7.6 Synthesis: Comparing the Frameworks

We can now see the systematic differences across these three philosophies:

Dimension	Idealism	Materialism	Madhyasth Darshan
Ontology	Spirit/Idea as ultimate reality	Matter as ultimate reality	Co-existence of diverse units in a relationship
Epistemology	Reason/Intuition primary	Empirical observation primarily	Direct realisation (<i>anubhav</i>) + understanding (<i>bodh</i>) + Praman
Ethics	Absolute moral laws	Relative cultural constructs	Universal conduct from understanding
Society	Hierarchical order	Class conflict	Complementary cooperation
Economics	Ascetic minimalism	Consumerist growth	Cyclical sufficiency

Each column has internal coherence—the positions in different rows support one another. Suppose spirit is the ultimate reality (Idealism).

In that case, reason grasping eternal truths makes sense epistemologically; absolute moral laws reflect transcendent order; hierarchical society mirrors metaphysical hierarchy; and ascetic detachment from matter follows naturally.

Suppose matter is the ultimate reality (Materialism). In that case, empirical investigation makes epistemological sense, ethics becomes conventional or relative, society is understood through material conflicts, and economic production/consumption becomes central to life.

If co-existence is a fundamental reality (Madhyasth Darshan), then direct realisation of relationships makes epistemological sense; ethics flows from understanding interdependence; society is organised around complementarity; and economics serves sustainable sufficiency.

The question is which framework better corresponds to reality and better enables human flourishing. Idealism and Materialism each capture important truths, while each has significant blind spots. Madhyasth Darshan claims to integrate their insights while transcending their limitations. Whether this claim succeeds requires both philosophical analysis and practical testing (Nagraj, 2015; Tripathi, 2015).

Conclusion

This comparative analysis reveals that Madhyasth Darshan offers a genuine alternative to Western dualistic thought, not merely a compromise between Idealism and Materialism, but a different kind of framework altogether. Grounding ontology in co-existence rather than substance (mental or material), it creates space for integration rather than opposition.

The comparative matrix demonstrates systematic differences across all dimensions—ontology, epistemology, ethics, social organisation, and economics. In each domain, Madhyasth Darshan attempts to preserve insights from both Idealism and Materialism

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while avoiding their characteristic errors. It affirms consciousness without denying matter (contra Materialism) and affirms matter without reducing consciousness to it (contra reductive Materialism). It provides ethical objectivity without transcendent absolutism (contra Idealism) and practical guidance without reducing to relativism (contra some forms of Materialism).

However, questions and challenges remain. Can co-existential philosophy really resolve long-standing philosophical problems, or does it merely relocate them? Does it provide sufficient practical guidance for concrete ethical and political decisions? Can its economic proposals be implemented at scale in complex modern societies? These questions can only be answered through ongoing philosophical development and practical experimentation.

The next chapter will place Madhyasth Darshan in dialogue with other contemporary movements—phenomenology, systems theory, ecological philosophy, and related approaches. This will help us understand whether co-existential thinking represents an isolated development or part of a broader shift in human understanding toward more integrative, relational, and ecological frameworks.

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Comparative Matrix

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Chapter 8: Co-Existence and Contemporary Thought

The previous chapter compared Madhyasth Darshan with the classical Western traditions of Idealism and Materialism. But philosophy did not end with Hegel and Marx. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have produced rich developments in Continental philosophy, systems theory, ecological thought, and various movements for social transformation. How does Madhyasth Darshan relate to these contemporary currents?

This chapter explores connections between co-existential philosophy and several important contemporary movements: phenomenology's attention to lived experience, systems theory's emphasis on relationships and wholes, ecological philosophy's recognition of interdependence, and various practical movements for human-centred development, including Gandhi's Sarvodaya, Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful," and Deep Ecology. The goal is to situate Madhyasth Darshan within the broader landscape of contemporary thought, identifying both resonances and distinctive contributions.

What emerges is a picture of convergent developments—thinkers across different traditions and contexts arriving at similar insights about relationship, interdependence, and holistic understanding. Madhyasth Darshan is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a larger shift away from dualistic, mechanistic, and reductionist frameworks toward more integrative, ecological, and relational ways of thinking. Yet it also has distinctive features that make it a unique contribution to this emerging paradigm (Capra, 1996).

8.1 Dialogue with Phenomenology

Phenomenology, the philosophical movement founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and developed by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others, shares significant common ground with

Madhyasth Darshan despite emerging from a completely different context.

8.1.1 Husserl and the Return to Direct Experience: Husserl's phenomenology began with a call to return "to the things themselves" (*zu den Sachen selbst*)—to examine phenomena as they are directly experienced rather than through inherited theories and assumptions. This requires "bracketing" or suspending our ordinary beliefs about what exists and how things work, allowing us to describe experience without prejudice (Husserl, trans. 1970).

This resonates strongly with Nagraj's emphasis on *anubhav*—direct realisation through immediate experience. Both reject detached theorising in favour of careful attention to what is actually given in experience. Both recognise that conceptual frameworks, while necessary, can also obscure reality if we mistake our concepts for things themselves. Both call for a disciplined seeing that penetrates beneath habitual assumptions (Nagraj, 2015, P.45; Moran, 2000).

However, there are differences. Husserl initially pursued phenomenology as a search for apodictic certainty—indubitable foundations for knowledge. His method of transcendental reduction aimed to reveal the structures of pure consciousness. Nagraj's *anubhav* is not about achieving certainty or isolating pure consciousness but about realising co-existential relationships. While Husserl's early work retained Cartesian elements (the primacy of the ego, the search for foundations), Nagraj begins from a relationship rather than from isolated consciousness (Nagraj, 2015, p. 45; Zahavi, 2003).

8.1.2 Heidegger and Being-in-the-World: Heidegger's development of phenomenology moved decisively away from Cartesian starting points. His concept of *Dasein* (human being) as fundamentally *being-in-the-world* rejects the subject-object split. We are not isolated minds observing an external world but beings already involved in a world of meanings, relationships, and practical engagements. Our primary mode of relating to things is not detached knowing but engaged coping—using tools, inhabiting spaces,

participating in shared practices (Heidegger, trans. 1962).

This parallels Madhyasth Darshan's insistence that the relationship is primary. We do not first exist in isolation and then enter into relationships; our relationships constitute us. The human being (*Jeevan* in *Chetan*) exists always already in relationship with *Vishva* (world/nature) and with other humans. Knowing is not bridging a gap between separate substances but a mode of relationship—one among others, alongside practical engagement, emotional connection, and ethical responsibility (Nagraj, 2015, P.16; Dreyfus, 1991).

Both Heidegger and Nagraj criticise the technological attitude that treats everything, including humans, as resources to be exploited. Both call for a different relationship to nature and to being itself—one of respect, care, and recognition of intrinsic value rather than mere instrumental utility. Both see modern alienation and the environmental crisis as rooted in a mistaken understanding of our fundamental relationship to reality (Heidegger, trans. 1977; Nagraj, 2007, p. 113).

Yet differences remain. Heidegger's thought is deeply historical—concerned with the history of being, the epochs of Western metaphysics, and the destiny of the West. Nagraj's thought is more universal—co-existence is not historically variable but the permanent structure of reality. Heidegger remained sceptical of systematic philosophy and ethical theory; Nagraj offers comprehensive systems. Heidegger's later work became increasingly mystical and poetic; Nagraj maintains conceptual clarity even when addressing transcendent themes (Nagraj, 2007, P.28).

8.1.3 Merleau-Ponty and Embodied Perception: Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception emphasises embodiment—we experience and know the world through our living bodies, not through disembodied minds. Perception is not passive reception of sense data but active engagement in which body and world intertwine. The perceiving body and perceived world are not

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separate substances but poles of a unified field of experience (Merleau-Ponty, trans. 1962).

This resonates with Madhyasth Darshan's account of *Chetan*—the conscious body as the medium through which *Jeevan* (consciousness) relates to *Vishva* (world). Nagraj rejects Cartesian mind-body dualism just as Merleau-Ponty does. The body is not a machine driven by a separate mind but the living presence of consciousness in the world. Perception is not a representation of an external world in an internal mind but a mode of being-with the world (Nagraj, 2008, P.16; Carman, 2008).

Both philosophers also emphasise the pre-reflective or pre-conceptual dimension of experience. Before we think about things, we already have a kind of bodily understanding of them. A skilled craftsperson's hands "know" how to shape materials; a musician's body "knows" how to produce sounds. This bodily knowledge is not inferior to conceptual knowledge but foundational to it. Similarly, Nagraj's *anubhav* includes, but is not limited to, conceptual thought—there is a direct awareness that precedes and grounds conceptualisation (Merleau-Ponty, trans. 1962; Gaur, 2008).

8.1.4 Common Ground and Differences: Phenomenology and Madhyasth Darshan share fundamental commitments: the priority of experience over theory, the rejection of mind-body dualism, the recognition that humans are essentially related to the world and others, and the call for transformed understanding rather than mere information accumulation. These convergences are remarkable given the different cultural and intellectual contexts (Nagraj, 2008, P.16).

However, phenomenology remains primarily descriptive and analytical—it describes structures of experience and existence but generally avoids prescriptive claims about how we should live. Madhyasth Darshan is both descriptive and prescriptive—it describes co-existential reality and prescribes how to live in accordance with that reality. Phenomenology is a philosophical method; Madhyasth Darshan is a comprehensive worldview

including ethics, politics, and economics. This makes Madhyasth Darshan more ambitious and perhaps more vulnerable to criticism, but also more practically relevant (Nagraj, 2015, P.116).

8.2 Dialogue with Systems Theory

Systems theory, developed in biology, cybernetics, and various sciences during the mid-twentieth century, offers another important point of comparison. Like phenomenology, it challenges reductionist and mechanistic frameworks, though from a scientific rather than a philosophical perspective.

8.2.1 General Systems Theory: Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory (GST) proposed that many phenomena—biological organisms, ecosystems, social organisations—are best understood as systems: wholes composed of interrelated parts, where the whole has properties not reducible to the parts taken separately. The behaviour of a system depends on relationships among components, not just on the components themselves (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

This directly parallels Nagraj's insistence that existence is relational. Individual units (*sakaaron*) co-exist in relationships that constitute systems at various levels—atoms in molecules, cells in organisms, organisms in ecosystems, persons in societies. The properties of these systems emerge from relationships, not just from isolated components. To understand any phenomenon requires understanding not only its parts but also how those parts relate (Nagraj, 2008, p. 13; Capra, 1996).

Systems theory distinguishes between closed systems (which do not exchange matter or energy with their environment) and open systems (which do). Living systems are paradigmatically open—organisms continuously exchange materials and energy with their environment while maintaining their organisation. This openness-while-maintaining-identity resonates with Madhyasth Darshan's account of how individual beings are distinct yet essentially connected to the larger whole (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Nagraj, 2015).

8.2.2 Cybernetics and Feedback: Cybernetics, developed by

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Norbert Wiener and others, studies how systems regulate themselves through feedback loops. A thermostat maintains temperature by sensing deviations from a set point and triggering corrective actions. Living organisms maintain homeostasis through complex feedback mechanisms. Social systems self-organise through communication and information flows (Wiener, 1948).

Madhyasth Darshan's concept of *Manvav Samvidhan* (order/system) similarly emphasises self-regulation and dynamic equilibrium. Natural systems maintain balance through intrinsic ordering principles—what might be called dharma at the cosmic level. Social systems should be organised to maintain balance—ensuring that everyone's needs are met, that resources cycle sustainably, and that conflicts are resolved constructively. This requires feedback mechanisms that detect imbalance and enable corrective action (Nagraj, 2007, p. 98).

8.2.3 Autopoiesis and Self-Organisation: Later developments in systems theory, particularly Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's concept of autopoiesis (self-making), emphasise that living systems are self-organising and self-maintaining. A living cell continuously produces the components that constitute it; it creates itself through its own operation. This radical autonomy is paradoxically coupled with dependence—the cell needs an environment that supplies resources and receives wastes (Maturana & Varela, 1980).

This combination of autonomy and dependence mirrors Madhyasth Darshan's account of individual beings. Each being has its own integrity and agency—it is a distinct *sakaar* (unit). Yet it exists only in relationship to the larger whole—it co-exists in *avkash* (space/medium) with other beings. Individual autonomy and relational dependence are not opposed but complementary aspects of existence (Nagraj, 2015, P.6; Varela et al., 1991).

8.2.4 Holism Without Mysticism: Systems theory offers scientific holism—recognising that wholes are more than sums of parts without invoking mystical or supernatural explanations. Properties

like life, consciousness, and social organisation emerge from complex material organisation. This emergence is natural, not miraculous; it can be studied scientifically, even if not reducible to simpler levels (Capra, 1996).

Madhyasth Darshan similarly offers holism without mysticism. Co-existence is not a mysterious force or spiritual essence but the fundamental structure of reality, investigable through observation and reasoning. The relationships that constitute systems are real and can be understood, even if they cannot be reduced to isolated components. This makes Madhyasth Darshan compatible with scientific investigation while resisting reductive materialism (Nagraj, 2015, P.4).

8.2.5 Limitations and Extensions: However, most systems theory remains within a broadly materialist framework—systems are ultimately physical processes, even if complex and emergent. Consciousness is typically treated as an emergent property of neural systems. Madhyasth Darshan goes further, treating consciousness (*Jeevan*) as irreducible and fundamental, not merely emergent from matter. This is a significant philosophical difference (Nagraj, 2015, P.16).

Moreover, systems theory is primarily descriptive—it analyses how systems work but does not prescribe how they should work. Madhyasth Darshan includes normative dimensions—certain modes of organisation are more aligned with co-existential reality than others—and humans have a responsibility to realise harmonious co-existence. Systems theory provides tools for understanding; Madhyasth Darshan adds a vision for transformation (Nagraj, 2007, p. 98).

8.3 Dialogue with Ecological Philosophy

Ecological philosophy, emerging especially from the 1960s onward, represents perhaps the closest Western parallel to Madhyasth Darshan's co-existential vision. Various streams of ecological thought—deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, and others—converge on themes of interdependence, holism, and the need for

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transformed human-nature relationships.

8.3.1 Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic: Aldo Leopold's land ethic, articulated in *A Sand County Almanack* (1949), proposed extending ethical consideration beyond humans to include "soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." Leopold argued that humans are not conquerors of the land-community but "plain members and citizens of it." This requires transforming from an economic to an ecological consciousness—seeing ourselves as participants in a larger community rather than as exploiters of resources (Leopold, 1949).

This parallels Nagraj's insistence that human existence in co-existence with all of nature—the material order (*padarth avastha*), pranic order (*pran avastha*), and animal order (*jiv avastha*). We are not separate from or above nature but part of the natural order, distinguished by our unique capacities (self-reflective consciousness) but not separated from the whole. Right human living requires recognising and respecting this interconnection (Nagraj, 2015, P.7; Callicott, 1989).

Both Leopold and Nagraj ground ethics in ontology—in the actual structure of reality rather than in human preferences or divine commands. For Leopold, ecological interdependence is a fact, and ethics should reflect that fact. For Nagraj, co-existence is the fundamental reality, and right conduct flows from understanding it. Both thus offer naturalistic ethics without reducing ethics to mere instrumental reasoning (Leopold, 1949; Nagraj, 2015, P.1).

8.3.2 Deep Ecology and Ecological Self: Arne Naess's deep ecology movement explicitly rejects the human-nature dualism that characterises modern Western culture. Deep ecology distinguishes between shallow environmentalism (protecting nature for human benefit) and deep ecology (recognising nature's intrinsic value and our essential connection to it). Naess proposed the concept of "ecological self"—identifying not just with one's individual ego but with the larger whole of nature (Naess, 1973; Devall & Sessions, 1985).

This resonates profoundly with Madhyasth Darshan. Nagraj similarly rejects anthropocentrism—the view that only humans matter morally. All beings have their place and value within existence. Understanding co-existence means recognising our essential interconnection with all of nature, not just other humans. This is not sentimental or mystical, but recognition of actual relationships (Nagraj, 2015, p. 7; Gaur, 2008).

Both Naess and Nagraj emphasise the need for transformed consciousness, not just new policies. The environmental crisis stems from a misperception—seeing ourselves as separate from and superior to nature. The solution requires not just technological fixes or regulatory reforms, but fundamental change in how we understand ourselves and our relationship to the natural world (Naess, 1989; Nagraj, 2015, p. 44).

However, there are differences in emphasis. Deep ecology sometimes tends toward biocentrism—treating all life as equally valuable, potentially minimising human distinctiveness. Madhyasth Darshan recognises humans' unique position as the only beings capable of understanding co-existence and consciously organising life accordingly. This is not superiority in the sense of having the right to dominate, but a distinctive responsibility to realise harmony (Nagraj, 2015, p. 14).

8.3.3 Ecofeminism and Care: Ecofeminist thinkers like Carolyn Merchant and Val Plumwood argue that environmental destruction is linked to patriarchal thinking that devalues both women and nature. The same dualistic logic that sees mind as superior to body, culture to nature, and man to woman also justifies the exploitation of the natural world. Ecofeminism calls for an ethics of care and relationship to replace the ethics of domination and control (Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 1993).

Madhyasth Darshan's emphasis on family (*parivar*) as the model for social organisation resonates with ecofeminism's ethics of care. In healthy families, relationships are not hierarchical domination but mutual care and support. Different members have different roles and

capacities, but all are valued. Extending this model to human-nature relationships suggests that care for nature is not a resource to be managed but the larger whole within which we live (Nagraj, 2007, p. 98).

Both ecofeminism and Madhyasth Darshan critique the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous, rational individuals separate from nature and social relations. Both emphasise relationality, interdependence, and care as central to ethics. Both see the environmental crisis as a symptom of deeper spiritual and philosophical problems requiring transformed worldviews (Warren, 2000; Nagraj, 2007, p. 98).

8.3.4 Social Ecology and Freedom: Murray Bookchin's social ecology argues that environmental problems cannot be separated from social problems—hierarchy, domination, and exploitation in human society extend to human treatment of nature. The solution requires not just a new relationship to nature but fundamental social transformation toward decentralised, participatory, ecological communities (Bookchin, 1982).

This aligns with Madhyasth Darshan's integration of individual development, social organisation, and ecological responsibility. Nagraj insists that personal transformation, social justice, and environmental sustainability are inseparable. One cannot achieve genuine fulfilment while exploiting others or destroying nature. Right social organisation—complementary rather than hierarchical or conflictual—naturally promotes ecological sustainability (Nagraj, 2007, p. 98).

Both social ecology and Madhyasth Darshan envision a decentralised organisation based on local communities that meet their own needs directly while coordinating with larger regions. Both emphasise participatory decision-making rather than top-down authority. Both see human freedom and ecological health as interdependent—genuine human flourishing requires healthy ecosystems, and ecological health requires humans acting responsibly (Bookchin, 1982; Nagraj, 2007, P.98).

8.4 Resonances with Practical Movements

Beyond academic philosophy, Madhyasth Darshan resonates with various practical movements for social transformation that emerged in the twentieth century. Three deserve particular attention: Gandhi's Sarvodaya, Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful," and the broader movement for appropriate technology and human-scale development.

8.4.1 Gandhi's Sarvodaya: Welfare of All: Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Sarvodaya—literally "uplift of all" or "welfare of all"—envisioned a society organised around principles of non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), and service (seva). Rather than majority rule that disregards minorities, Sarvodaya seeks arrangements that benefit everyone. Rather than centralised industrialism concentrating power and wealth, Sarvodaya promotes a village-based economy where communities meet their own needs (Gandhi, 1962; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997).

Gandhi's vision parallels Madhyasth Darshan in multiple ways. Both reject Western modernity's individualism, materialism, and exploitation. Both emphasise community over isolated individuals, sufficiency over endless accumulation, harmony over conflict. Both ground social ethics in deeper philosophical or spiritual understanding—for Gandhi, truth and non-violence are the ultimate reality; for Nagraj, co-existence is fundamental (Nagraj, 2008, P.27).

Both also emphasise the necessity of transformed consciousness for social transformation. Gandhi's satyagraha (truth-force) requires inner spiritual development, not just external resistance. Similarly, Nagraj insists that social change depends on individuals' realising co-existential understanding. New social structures without a transformed understanding will reproduce old problems in new forms (Gandhi, 1962; Nagraj, 2008, p. 27).

However, Gandhi's thought was more explicitly religious, rooted in Hinduism, while embracing all religions. Nagraj's philosophy is more secular and systematic, offering comprehensive ontology and

epistemology rather than primarily spiritual teachings. Gandhi emphasised moral duty and self-sacrifice; Nagraj emphasises fulfilment through right understanding. These are different emphases within broadly compatible visions (Chatterjee, 1983).

8.4.2 Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful": E.F. Schumacher's influential book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973) challenged the assumption that bigger is better, arguing for human-scale technology, decentralised organisation, and economics oriented toward genuine human needs rather than abstract growth. Schumacher advocated what he called "Buddhist economics"—recognising that work should be meaningful participation, not mere drudgery, and that material sufficiency differs from endless accumulation (Schumacher, 1973).

This resonates strongly with Madhyasth Darshan's economic vision. Nagraj's *avartansheel arthashastra* similarly rejects unlimited growth in favour of sustainable sufficiency, large-scale industrialism in favour of human-scale organisation, and work-as-exploitation in favour of work-as-participation. Both propose that genuine prosperity means everyone has enough, not that anyone has vastly more than needed (Nagraj, 2009, p. 128; Schumacher, 1973).

Both also emphasise appropriate technology—tools and methods scaled to human capacities and ecological limits rather than maximising productivity at the cost of unemployment, alienation, and environmental destruction. The goal is not technological regression but technology serving genuine human welfare within sustainable ecological limits (Schumacher, 1973; Nagraj, 2009, P.128).

Schumacher, like Gandhi, drew on religious and spiritual traditions—Buddhist economics, Catholic social teaching, Gandhian philosophy. Nagraj offers more systematic philosophical grounding in co-existential ontology. But both agree that economic organisation should serve human flourishing and ecological sustainability rather than treating these as constraints on economic growth (Wood, 1984).

8.4.3 Appropriate Technology and Human Development: The broader appropriate technology movement, including thinkers like Ivan Illich and development critics like Vandana Shiva, challenges the assumption that Western-style industrialisation represents progress that all societies should pursue. Instead, they advocate technologies and development paths appropriate to local contexts, cultures, and ecological conditions (Illich, 1973; Shiva, 1988).

Madhyasth Darshan fits within this movement. Nagraj's emphasis on family and village as basic social units, on meeting needs locally rather than through global supply chains, on knowledge rooted in direct understanding rather than externally imposed expertise—all align with appropriate technology principles. Both reject one-size-fits-all development models in favour of diverse paths that respect local knowledge and conditions (Nagraj, 2009, p. 144; Esteva & Prakash, 1998).

However, Madhyasth Darshan is not simply traditionalist or anti-modern. It welcomes genuine knowledge and beneficial technology while criticising exploitative organisations and destructive practices. The question is not tradition versus modernity, but right understanding versus confusion, sustainable sufficiency versus destructive excess, and harmony versus exploitation (Nagraj, 2009, p. 143).

8.5 Madhyasth Darshan as a New Human-Centric Paradigm

These various dialogues and resonances reveal Madhyasth Darshan as part of a broader shift in contemporary thought—away from dualism, reductionism, and mechanistic worldviews toward holistic, relational, and ecological understanding. Phenomenology, systems theory, ecological philosophy, and movements for social transformation all converge on recognising relationship, interdependence, and wholeness as fundamental.

Yet Madhyasth Darshan offers something distinctive: a comprehensive, systematic philosophy that integrates ontology, epistemology, ethics, social theory, and economics within a unified

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coexistential framework. Most other approaches focus on particular dimensions—phenomenology on experience, systems theory on organisation, ecological philosophy on human-nature relationships. Nagraj attempts to show how all these dimensions interconnect within a single vision (Nagraj, 2009, P.88).

Moreover, Madhyasth Darshan is explicitly human-centric in a specific sense. It recognises humans as having distinctive capacities and responsibilities—we alone can understand the concept of co-existence conceptually and organise our lives consciously in accordance with that understanding. This is not anthropocentrism in the sense of claiming that humans are superior or have a right to dominate. Rather, it is recognition that humans have a unique capacity for wisdom and a unique responsibility to realise harmony (Gaur, 2008).

This human-centrism is liberating and demanding. Liberating because it affirms human potential for fulfilment, prosperity, security, and conscious co-existence—these are not impossible ideals but realisable possibilities when we understand correctly and organise appropriately. Demanding because it places responsibility squarely on humans—we cannot blame God, fate, or nature for our problems. If we suffer exploitation, environmental destruction, and social conflict, it is because we have not yet realised and implemented co-existential understanding (Nagraj, 2015, 2007).

Finally, Madhyasth Darshan offers not just analysis but vision—a detailed picture of what individual fulfilment and collective harmony look like, how to organise the economy sustainably, and how to structure society to enable everyone's development. This makes it more than philosophy in the narrow academic sense; it is philosophy as wisdom for living, as a guide for transformation, and as a resource for reimagining human possibilities (Nagraj, 2015, p. 16).

Conclusion

This chapter has placed Madhyasth Darshan in dialogue with major contemporary movements in Western thought: phenomenology's

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return to lived experience, systems theory's holistic approach, ecological philosophy's recognition of interdependence, and practical movements for human-centred development. In each case, we find significant resonances—common recognition that dualistic, reductionist, and mechanistic frameworks are inadequate, shared emphasis on relationship and wholeness, convergent calls for transformed understanding and practice.

These resonances suggest that Madhyasth Darshan is not an isolated development but part of a broader paradigm shift in human thought. Across different traditions, contexts, and disciplines, thinkers are arriving at similar insights about the fundamental nature of reality and the requirements for human flourishing and ecological sustainability. This convergence lends credibility to co-existential philosophy—it is not merely one person's idiosyncratic vision but participates in broader currents of contemporary thought.

Yet Madhyasth Darshan also makes distinctive contributions: systematic integration of multiple dimensions within a unified framework, explicit grounding in ontological claims about coexistence, detailed elaboration of implications for economics and social organisation, and a combination of philosophical rigour with practical orientation. These features make it a significant resource for anyone seeking alternatives to dominant paradigms that have generated so much suffering and destruction.

The journey through these eight chapters has traced a path from diagnosis of fragmentation (Part I) through exposition of co-existential philosophy (Part II) to comparative analysis and contemporary dialogue (Part III). We have seen how Madhyasth Darshan emerges from and speaks to perennial philosophical questions while addressing urgent contemporary crises. The question now is: what difference might this philosophy make? How might co-existential understanding transform actual lives and societies? These questions remain open, awaiting the practical experimentation and collective commitment that alone can answer them definitively.

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