

VEDIC BASED FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOs) AS AN AGENT OF
TRANSFORMATION FOR IMPLEMENTING THE UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (UN SDGs)

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bharat, Shri Narendra Modi Ji, for introducing Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) in the 75th year of India's independence with seven categories of individual action items such that most actions are:

1. Specific and measurable
2. Easy to practice by individuals, communities and institutions, with minimal supply-side dependencies
3. Non-disruptive to ongoing economic activity, and, in fact, promoting economic activity in the foreseeable future

Website: <https://missionlife-moefcc.nic.in/>

This dissertation is also dedicated to His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the Founder Acharya of ISKCON, for sharing the seven purposes of ISKCON (<https://iskconnews.org/the-seven-purposes-of-iskcon/>), and to His Holiness Radhanath Swami Maharaja for inspiring the creation of ISKCON's Govardhan Ecovillage (<https://www.ecovillage.org.in/>), a greenfield Temple Town of Bharat based on the principles of spirituality, sustainability, and social impact (S3 Impact), where all 17 UN SDGs are being implemented to different degrees.

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Gauranga Das (aka A S K Anand).

ABSTRACT

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This research examines the transformative potential of Vedic-based FBOs in supporting the implementation of the UN SDGs. Although FBOs have been acknowledged for contributing to social welfare and sustainable development across different religious backgrounds, there has been no research exploring the impact of Vedic-based FBOs on the UN SDGs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the alignment of the UN SDGs with the Vedic-based principles guiding Vedic-based FBOs. The primary focus of this research is to assess the relationship between Vedic philosophy and sustainable development.

Specifically, this research uses the case study of Govardhan Ecovillage, a Vedic-based FBO in India, to understand the relationship between Vedic philosophy and sustainable development. Qualitative methods were employed in this research using interviews with stakeholders at Govardhan Ecovillage and grounded theory. The case study explored the thematic areas such as ecological balance, community resilience, and ethical governance that enable the implementation of the UN SDGs.

Additionally, this research will provide both academic and practical contributions. From an academic perspective, this study will fill a significant knowledge gap by identifying how Vedic faith traditions can support the achievement of the five Ps of the SDGs: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. From a practical perspective, this study will provide a comprehensive theoretical and methodological framework to policymakers, development professionals, and FBO practitioners to utilize Vedic philosophical principles to expedite the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, by demonstrating the mechanisms through which Vedic-based FBOs are able to implement sustainable practices, this study will pave the way for evidence-based collaborative efforts between faith communities and global development actors.

KEYWORDS: Faith-Based Organizations, United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, Vedas, Ramayan, Srimad Bhagavatam.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FBO: Faith-Based Organisation

FBNGO: Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organization

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

UN SDGs: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

UNDP: United Nations Development Program

GEV: Govardhan Eco-Village

BG: Bhagavad Gita

SB: Srimad Bhagavatam

VR: Valmiki Ramayan

MB: Mahabharat

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Problem	2
1.3 Purpose of Research	3
1.4 Significance of the Study	3
1.5 Research Purpose and Questions	4
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
2.1 Theoretical Framework	5
2.2 History of recognizing the role of FBOs in fulfilling UN SDGs	12
2.3 Studies on the Vedic-based FBOs in addressing sustainability	18
2.4 Summary	22
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	23
3.1 Overview of the Research Problem	23
3.2 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs	23
3.3 Research Purpose and Questions	24
3.4 Research Design	25
3.5 Population and Sample	25
3.6 Participant Selection	26
3.7 Instrumentation	27
3.8 Methods for Collecting Data	27
3.9 Analyzing Data	28
3.10 Limitations of the Research Design	28
3.11 Conclusion	29
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	31
4.1 Research Question One	31
4.2 Research Question Two	37
4.3 Research Question Three	99
4.4 Research Question Four	105
4.5 Research Question Five	111
4.6 Summary of Findings	120
4.7 Conclusion	122
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	124
5.1 Discussion of Results	124
5.2 Summary	130
5.3 Implications	131
5.4 Recommendations for Future Research	133

5.5 Conclusion	134
REFERENCES	136
APPENDIX A: About The Sanskrit Anushtubh Meter (Chand)	144
APPENDIX B: Data Collection Methods	146
APPENDIX C: Interview Guide	147
APPENDIX D: Questionnaire	148
APPENDIX E: Informed Consent Form	154

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Vedic features and respective UN SDGs

97

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

A faith-based organization (FBO) is an organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activation from its teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within the faith (Emmanuel A. Ojewunmi, 2020). Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) have played a vital role in such efforts around social welfare and lately sustainable transformation as it gains foundational importance across dimensions of business, governance, and society (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Moyer et al., 2012; Olarinmoye, 2012). The variety of activities performed by FBOs include community welfare, health, community education, conflict resolution, rural development, skill development, and disaster management, among others (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Morse and McNamara, 2009; Platzer, 2021).

The concept of Sustainable Development is said to have originated from the 1987 Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, titled "Our Common Future." The definition of Sustainable Development in this report gained global acceptance among sustainability practitioners, researchers, and activists. According to the Brundtland Reports, Sustainable Development refers to "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Amodu, 2019: 69). The critical finding of the World Commission of Environment and Development concerning the connections between things in nature, eventually led the United Nations to the

adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, which was later transformed into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations has crafted 17 sustainable development goals (UNSDGs) as indicators to define the tenets of sustainability (Emmanuel A. Ojewunmi, 2020; Platzer, 2021; United Nations, 2015; UNSDG, 2020). The 17 SDGs further comprise 169 targets. Extant research suggests an impactful role of FBNGOs in the developmental and social contexts (Olarinmoye, 2012).

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) play a significant role in fulfilling the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) by leveraging their unique position at the intersection of spirituality, community engagement, and social action.

There are some studies done to analyse the impact of FBOs on UNSDGs. But these are primarily done in cases of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. However, there is very scarce research on the aspect of clear impact measurement of Vedic-based FBOs in UNSDGs. The Vedic-based FBOs can contribute to UNSDGs. Thus, an important research premise of establishing the impact of Vedic-based FBNGOs in implementing and attaining UNSDGs should be studied in-depth.

In this work we propose to study and analyse an FBO primarily built on the principles of Vedic Wisdom to raise a community in harmony with the self and nature for overall achievement of UNSDGs. It will be a revealing, exploratory, and niche study to understand how the FBO affects the overall alignment with the sustainable practices.

1.2 Research Problem

The key hypothesis of this research work is that faith-based non-governmental organizations, exemplified by Govardhan Ecovillage rooted in profound Vedic principles, exhibit a heightened convergence in their efforts to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The exploration of this correlation promises to unveil a wealth of valuable insights and implications.

1.3 Purpose of Research

The study has the following specific goals:

- to evaluate if there is an alignment between the philosophy and operations of the UN SDGs with the Vedic principles.
- to identify the most important organizational characteristics and values of Vedic-based organizations that allow them to work on sustainable development.
- to assess the different themes related to the engagement with SDGs by the Vedic-based organizations and to assess the different ways they transform the engagement in practical, realizable projects.
- to establish a model to measure the social, environmental, and spiritual impacts of Vedic-based organization initiatives in relation to the SDGs.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research is filling an important void in the literature with respect to Vedic-based FBOs that have been significantly understudied in studies of FBO contributions toward UN SDGs. This study will provide empirical evidence regarding the role that spiritual principles play in driving sustainable practices, and this information will be useful in informing policymakers and leaders of FBOs in establishing collaborative

relationships that will contribute toward achievement of the SDGs. In addition, the study's findings will serve to highlight the resiliency that exists within communities (as evidenced through the responses to crises like COVID-19) and the potential of these mechanisms to contribute to the larger discussion regarding community empowerment and environmental stewardship.

1.5 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of Vedic-based FBOs in achieving the UN SDGs through a case study of Govardhan Ecovillage.

The research questions are:

1. Why do Vedic-based FBOs have an alignment with the UN SDGs?
2. What are the key features in Vedic-based FBOs that promote UN SDGs?
3. What are the key thematic dimensions that are involved in terms of UN SDGs?
4. How do these thematic dimensions translate into actions of successful implementation of UN SDGs?
5. Finally, how to measure the impact of these sustainable practices in terms of actionable projects?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were the outcome of several years of discussion and negotiation hosted by the UN that began in 2012 as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were reaching their cut-off date of 2015. A mandate for the SDGs as a global set of goals for sustainable development that apply equally to all countries emerged after the Rio+20 conference in June 2012, and an intergovernmental Open Working Group (OWG) was set up to deliberate and outline the goals. (Tomalin et al., 2019).

Continuation from MDGs to SDGs

The 17 SDGs carry on the work begun by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which galvanized a global campaign from 2000 to 2015 to end poverty in its various dimensions. Yet while the MDGs only applied to developing countries, the SDGs will apply universally to all UN member states and are considerably more comprehensive and ambitious than the MDGs (Woodbridge, 2015). For the SDGs to be fully successful, urban areas and their local governments, where the majority of implementation and monitoring will occur, need to be empowered. Decentralized forms of cooperation and vertically integrated approaches that use the capabilities of local governmental actors can positively impact how successful the SDGs will be (Woodbridge, 2015).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), created in 2000, consisted of eight goals intended to address global poverty and its associated problems by 2015. These goals included eliminating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, advancing gender equality and empowering women, decreasing the number of children who die before reaching adulthood, enhancing maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and building global alliances for development. Each goal contained specific objectives and indicators to measure the accomplishment of each of these global goals, with an emphasis on poverty reduction, education, health, gender equality, and environmental sustainability globally (United Nations Millennium Development Goals, 2015).

MDGs vs SDGs

There is a significant difference between the way the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated, the process involved, the scope of the goals, and the method used to achieve them. The MDGs were created by a small UN expert group, while the SDGs were created using a participatory process with over 70 Open Working Groups, Civil Society Organizations, and a variety of stakeholders and the general public. While the MDGs were comprised of 8 goals, 21 targets, and 63 indicators, the SDGs have 17 goals, 169 targets, and the added benefit of narrowing focus to a few select targets.

The MDGs were targeted at developing countries and were funded by wealthier nations, while the SDGs require participation from all nations, both developed and developing. The SDGs provide a much greater focus on human development, equity,

and human rights than the MDGs and specifically address marginalized populations, disabilities, and discrimination. In addition, the SDGs have a more comprehensive health goal that addresses a person's overall well-being, as well as non-communicable disease prevention, and they place a greater role on the private sector in sustainable development than did the MDGs. Another major difference is that the SDGs give civil society organizations (CSOs) a much larger role than they were given in the MDGs. Overall, these changes demonstrate a much more inclusive and comprehensive approach to the SDGs compared to the MDGs (Kumar et al., 2016).

Five Pillars of SDGs

The SDGs were adopted through a United Nations General Assembly Resolution. In its preamble, the resolution outlines the five key pillars (5Ps) on which the goals are formulated. These pillars are People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership (United Nations, 2015).

As per the United Nations (2015) the 5 pillars under which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are formulated are:

1. **People:** to end poverty and hunger, and ensure all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality
2. **Planet:** to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change
3. **Prosperity:** to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature

4. Peace: to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence
5. Partnership: to implement the Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders, and all people.

Fifth Pillar: The Partnership

Under the fifth pillar, the SDGs resolution highlights the engagement of all relevant stakeholders in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the progress of SDGs' achievements. It enumerates the need for a global engagement in support of implementation of all the goals and targets, bringing together governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system, and other actors and mobilizing all available resources. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are identified as some of the key actors that will help drive the 2030 Agenda.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the SDGs

Nazal (2018) emphasizes the indispensable role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in implementing the 2030 Agenda, particularly focusing on five significant takeaways from the perspectives shared in the call for papers launched by ADB and the ADB Institute. Firstly, CSOs contribute innovative solutions to combat multidimensional poverty, as seen in World Vision's Graduation Approach in Armenia, providing

tailored support for families to achieve sustainable income. The second way civil society organizations support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is through the localization and monitoring of SDG progress, as evidenced by the use of a web-based monitoring system by Georgia. Civil society organizations provide citizens with a voice in governance and enhance citizen-centric governance, as can be observed in the Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi, Pakistan, where communities were involved in all aspects of service delivery. Civil society organizations protect marginalized communities and provide advocacy to influence government policies, as illustrated by Disha's success in influencing the budget planning process in the state of Gujarat, India. Finally, civil society organizations empower women to take climate actions, as can be observed in women-led groups in the Maldives after the 2004 tsunami recovery effort, demonstrating the ability of women to increase public awareness and promote sustainable agriculture. This illustrates the role of civil society organizations in helping governments achieve the goals of the SDGs, especially Goal 16, which seeks to promote inclusive decision-making and increased civil society participation.

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs): A subset of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

As part of the broader category of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), there exist Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), which perform two functions: serving as a vehicle for a religion and working to advance social development. Faith-Based Organizations are defined as organizations that are related to a faith community and are also partially or fully engaged in programs and activities designed to improve the economic and social wellbeing of individuals and/or communities (Mutie, 2019).

In addition to examining the distinctions between faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other organizational forms, James (2009) identifies several key attributes that differentiate FBOs from other types of organizations. Some attributes are as follows:

Structural Affiliation/Governance: FBOs have a strong connection to a faith community.

Values and Motivation: FBOs emphasize values in motivating employees and in guiding program and organizational decisions.

Mission: The primary mission of FBOs is to reflect the values of their sponsoring faith community.

Strategic Approach/Development Theories: FBOs often implement different strategies than non-faith-based organizations in achieving their goals.

Partnerships/Beneficiaries: FBOs carefully select partners and beneficiaries to ensure alignment with their faith community's values.

Program Implementation: FBOs incorporate the teachings of their sponsoring faith community into their program implementation.

Staff Dynamics/Leadership Structures: Staffing patterns and leadership structures of FBOs are shaped by the organization's relationship with its faith community.

Organizational Culture and Decision Making: The organizational culture of FBOs influences the decisions made by those leading the organization.

Constituency Served: The constituency served by FBOs is typically composed of individuals who share similar values and spiritual commitments.

Funding Sources: FBOs rely on a wide variety of funding sources, including their faith community, as well as private foundations and government grants.

Relationships with External Organizations: In order to achieve their mission, FBOs cultivate relationships with other organizations, both internal and external to the faith community.

Challenges and Opportunities of Working with Faith in Development Work:

Working with faith in the development sector has many opportunities but also presents challenges. On one hand, caution and inclusivity are required when involving FBOs to avoid doing harm. Some FBOs are reluctant to publicly declare their faith commitment and fear that donors will scrutinize them for their faith. On the other hand, FBOs offer many opportunities to provide effective development services, reach the poorest populations, foster advocacy among civil society organizations, and motivate active engagement.

Faith-based organizations have been shown to make significant contributions to community development in developing countries by providing social welfare services, improving the material well-being of community members, and creating opportunities for disadvantaged groups, thereby contributing to the reduction of poverty and community empowerment (Noor & Nawih, 2016).

Unlike secular aid organizations that operate independently of any religious affiliations, FBOs are unique in their community development initiatives because they are motivated and directed by religious beliefs and teachings (Noor & Nawih, 2016).

There exist various typologies to describe the diversity of FBOs and how they relate to their community development activities, including classifications of FBOs based on their organizational structure, the purpose of their activities, the type of services they provide, and how they are viewed by stakeholders (Noor & Nawih, 2016).

2.2 History of recognizing the role of FBOs in fulfilling UN SDGs

In Tomalin et al. (2019) it was noted that the three phases of the history of development studies focusing on religion include

1. The colonial period when religion and development efforts were ideologically entwined in the Christian “civilizing mission”;
2. The era of the secular global development industry in the post-World War II period, where the significant role that religion continued to play in local-level development and humanitarianism was marginalized in development studies and political processes; and
3. The “turn to religion” by global development policy and practice from the early 2000s.

The UNFPA has been the main space within the UN where religious engagement has been nurtured, and it now has decades of experience working with faith-based organizations, with several publications that explore the role of religion and culture in

its work. Faith-based entities with a foundation in community welfare and social service delivery are particularly obvious and prominent development agents. Thus, faith-based organizations (FBOs) combine development and cultural features in a powerful mandate. At a time when basic needs are becoming increasingly harder to provide for more than half of the world's population, we can no longer avoid acknowledging these parallel faith-based development interventions, which reach so many and provide so much. Many are critical venues for outreach, resources, and service delivery (UNFPA, 2009).

Role of FBOs in fulfilling UN SDGs

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) have been involved in helping achieve United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) around social welfare and are now increasingly involved in sustainable transformation, which is becoming important in terms of business, government, and society (Moyer et al., 2012; Olarinmoye, 2012; Chowdhury et al., 2019). Chowdhury et al. (2019) notes that Faith-Based Non-Governmental Organizations (FBNGOs) are a key part of many global humanitarian and community development initiatives, including providing services to improve health care, education, and environmental sustainability. These organizations have roots in their local communities and provide essential services.

Islamic NGOs and other FBNGOs are contributing to significant improvements in health care services, reducing poverty through innovative models, advocating for environmental protection and sustainability, and promoting environmental conservation and sustainability practices. Criticism of FBNGOs has developed since

9/11 due to criticisms of evangelizing and selectively providing services to individuals who share the same faith as they do, which has caused a number of Islamic NGOs to alter their relationships with donors. The literature about FBNGOs does contain references to their roles in community empowerment but contains very little direct evidence of their contribution to community empowerment; this is an evident gap in understanding the full range of their contributions and their level of involvement in different areas.

The World Bank suggests that the FBOs play an active and important role in achieving sustainable goals and combating poverty. Multiple reputed organizations, such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNPD), and others, envision the active role of FBO in sustainable actions (Platzer, 2021). The variety of activities performed by FBOs include community welfare, health, community education, conflict resolution, rural development, skill development, and disaster management, among others (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Morse and McNamara, 2009; Platzer, 2021). For 85% of the people on this planet, religion is a relevant factor, influencing not only the way they think but also how they act. For achieving the great vision of the Agenda 2030 with the 17 SDGs at its heart, collaboration with faith-based actors is therefore not an option but a necessity (Schliesser, 2023).

The importance of FBOs to the contribution of SDGs is studied in several studies (Tomalin et al., 2019). They are studied with respect to some organizations belonging to certain faiths. An increasing number of actors are looking at religion as a developmental resource or a tool for development, as opposed to being an obstacle to

development. Actors of faith who have been actively involved in the process of developing policies and have committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) now recognize themselves as development partners in addition to being voices for religion. For the purpose of this initiative, identifying relevant actors was essential; they needed to be identified based on their background and expertise so that appropriate engagement could take place.

Faith actors have recognized that perceived conflicts between certain SDGs and aspects of religion can be addressed by providing a bridge or mediator to help understand and address those concerns. Furthermore, it is imperative to partner with faith actors on their terms and not as tools for predetermined development objectives but instead to allow for an organic opportunity for participation. Faith leaders and faith-based institutions in the Global South were recognized for their capacity to assist local development initiatives and humanitarian efforts. Despite low levels of awareness regarding the consultation process for SDGs, faith actors saw utility in using the SDG framework for advocacy purposes and not as direct programmatic guidance; consequently, faith actor efforts were focused on addressing basic needs associated with SDGs 1, 3, and 4. However, challenges related to this effort included the fact that faith actors were rarely systematically included in SDG consultation processes and that success depended largely on the politics and bureaucratic processes of local governments.

Raney & Raveloharimisy (2016) examined the contributions of faith-based organizations to development and the humanitarian sector with regard to an

organization called ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), which is primarily a Christian organization. As part of the examination, the authors analyzed several factors that explain how an FBO has an added value to the SDGs.

Additionally, the authors provided suggestions on how FBOs can make a greater contribution to the SDGs.

FBOs such as ADRA have the extraordinary capability to mobilize people from all over the world because of their connection to religious institutions. Therefore, FBOs have an almost endless supply of global volunteers and an unlimited amount of money to fund their programs, even in remote locations where governments do not exist. FBOs will use disasters as opportunities to serve those that are less fortunate than others, based on the principles of their religions, to meet the immediate needs of people affected by disaster while establishing long-term sustainable solutions. The call for development literacy requires FBOs to become familiar with and understand the global development goals, including the UN SDGs, and to begin to develop the ability to contribute positively to development discussions. ADRA serves as an example of the ability of FBOs to serve humanity and align with the larger goals of sustainable development.

Similar analysis is also done by Emmanuel A. Ojewunmi (2020) for Nigerian Baptist Social Ministries, which are also Christian organizations. Emmanuel A. Ojewunmi (2020) indicates that the Nigerian Baptist Convention's Social Ministries are making a great deal of progress in advancing a number of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With regard to the advancement of SDGs in various areas such as health care, education, reducing inequalities, and promoting peace and

justice, the Baptist Social Ministries are directly engaged in a variety of initiatives designed to improve the quality of life for citizens of Nigeria. For example, in the area of health care, the Baptist Social Ministries provide funding to pay for medical expenses, provide relief materials, and combat epidemics. In the area of education, the Baptist Social Ministries support students who cannot afford school fees, support inmates receiving educational instruction, and rehabilitate individuals who have engaged in social crimes. The Baptist Social Ministries also provide counseling services to homeless people, provide rehabilitation services, and support the promotion of peace and justice. However, several recommendations for improvement have been made, including the need for additional funding, increased awareness among members of the Baptist Convention, collaboration with other organizations, and employee training to improve efficiency.

A study also identified the contribution of FBO to UN SDGs in specific countries such as Argentina (actalliance, 2019). This study provides a comprehensive overview of the significant contributions of Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) in advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study highlighted the important roles of FBOs in implementing numerous SDGs, including humanitarian efforts, education, healthcare, poverty reduction, gender equality, and environmental protection. FBOs utilize their network of community contacts, volunteers, and moral obligation to advance inclusive and holistic development. The study identifies challenges for FBOs, including the need for better measurement techniques, access to data on populations, and the importance of building stronger inter-institutional relationships. The study demonstrates that FBOs have aligned themselves with the

SDGs; they showcase collaborative approaches and seek to achieve sustainable results and portray FBOs as key players in global sustainable development.

2.3 Studies on the Vedic-based FBOs in addressing sustainability

In Fici (2020) an analysis is done on Govardhan Ecovillage, a Vedic-based FBO, of how the principles by which this community is formed are contributing to the environmental issues. It highlighted what aspects of a community can contribute to environmental sustainability. It talked about the anticipatory community. Rasmussen (2016) defines anticipatory community as "home places where it is possible to reimagine worlds and reorder possibilities, places where new or renewed practices give focus to an ecological and post-industrial way of life." He describes anticipatory communities as havens that are open to creative risk, where basic moral formation happens by conscious choice and not by default. Within these communities, eco-social virtues are consciously cultivated and embodied in community practices, and the fault lines of modernity are exposed.

Anticipatory communities are places of renewed homegoing and homecoming, where planetary intimacy and belonging, and living devotion to Earth, can be cultivated afresh and anew. They are intentionally set-apart contemplative havens, detached from the pressures of fossil fuel turbo-capitalist society, and they actively fertilize the radical, life-giving, justice-seeking imagination. Additionally, the practice of creating and recreating Earth ethics is a collectively embodied vocation within anticipatory communities.

An analysis is done in Bartolone (2019) to see how ecovillages are contributing to the paradigms of sustainability. Bartolone (2019) discusses the case study of Govardhan Ecovillage and Vedic culture in India as a model of sustainability. The author explores the relationship between sustainability and Vedic culture by combining approaches from cultural geography, political ecology, ecological economics, and post-development theory. The study employs grounded theory to explain the fundamental dimensions of Vedic culture as sustainability.

Bartolone (2019) combines approaches from cultural geography, political ecology, ecological economics, and post-development theory to understand how holistic sustainability is embedded in the ancient spiritual culture of India practiced by Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV).

The study by Fici (2022) outlines the ecological integrity and Earth-honoring teachings of Gaudiya Vaishnavism with particular emphasis on the Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV) as an example of a community attempting to live out these principles. The author attempts to establish the linkages between the existential and ecological aspects of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and to emphasize the necessity to develop an anticipatory vision and praxis to address the ecological crisis. The author also points to the ongoing presence of casteism in the community and calls for additional research to identify solutions to eliminate this issue. The article provides an overview of the theological understanding of the relationship between existential and ecological aspects of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and describes how the elimination of selfish desire and the identification of the self as separate from God are critical to resolving the ecological crisis. The author argues that Gaudiya Vaishnavism offers an eco-theology relevant to today's civilizational crisis.

Gaudiya Vaishnavism views the interconnectedness of humans and the environment as being based upon the concept of sanatana-dharma, which connects all beings to the universe and to the ultimate origin of their existence. Gaudiya Vaishnavism also promotes a lifestyle that does not harm, pollute, or exploit the earth. Followers of the tradition, however, often struggle to maintain this commitment due to the influence of the global economic system of turbo-capitalism.

The Govardhan Ecovillage utilizes Earth-honoring practices that include organic farming, cow protection, alternative energy usage, rural empowerment, and the "Wadi Program" in order to promote sustainable living and to foster the responsibility to protect the environment. All of the practices employed at GEV are grounded in the Earth-honoring theology of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and are designed to create a community that reflects the values of the tradition.

Vaishnava theology defines the ecological crisis as being resolved through the implementation of an earth-honoring lifestyle that is consistent with the concept of sanatana-dharma and is characterized by practices that do not harm, pollute, or exploit the earth. The Govardhan Eco-Village exemplifies this approach to resolving the ecological crisis through its implementation of organic farming, cow protection, alternative energy usage, and rural empowerment as part of its Earth-honoring practices.

In the article by Jodhka and Bora (2012), some analysis is provided regarding FBOs in the state of Maharashtra, India, with regard to what types of FBOs exist. They describe the mapping of faith-based development activities in modern-day Maharashtra, India. The research program seeks to examine the relationships among major world religions, development in low-income countries, and poverty reduction.

The research program is focused on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Tanzania) and seeks to provide knowledge and resources that will facilitate dialogue between development partners and ultimately lead to the achievement of development goals. The six major world religions examined in this research program are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and African traditional belief systems. The research program seeks to investigate the relationships among these religions, development in low-income countries, and poverty reduction.

Faith communities, through their values and beliefs, affect the interactions between governments and societies in numerous ways. For instance, in India, colonial rule and related policies altered the manner in which the different faith communities viewed themselves and each other. The introduction of British rule and the subsequent actions of the church in the nineteenth century prompted reactions from other faith communities, resulting in a change in the political sociology of the major faith communities in the subcontinent. The social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the nationalist mobilizations among Hindus and Muslims completely transformed the political sociology of these communities. Independence greatly impacted the social environment and allowed for the reentry of religion into India's public sphere in a variety of ways, providing a new platform for religious activity.

The outcomes of the interactions between faith communities and development actors in pursuing development objectives can vary. While some faith-based development activities are valuable and effective in involving marginalized individuals, some organizations implement exclusionary political agendas under the guise of development (Jodhka and Bora, 2012).

2.4 Summary

Since the UN recognized the importance of FBOs in the pursuit of sustainability (Mutie, 2019), there have been many studies conducted on FBOs from around the world and from a variety of faiths (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Moyer et al., 2012; Olarinmoye, 2012). After reviewing this body of literature, it is evident that very little research has investigated the impact of Vedic-based FBOs on the UN SDGs. As a result, this research endeavor has the potential to serve as a bridge between the theoretical understanding and practical applications of Vedic-based FBOs in terms of their alignment with the UN SDGs. Through the examination of the complexities of this relationship, this study will contribute to both the realm of academia and to the field of practice, providing a foundation for informed decision-making and increased participation of Vedic-based FBOs in efforts to create a more sustainable future.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

This study seeks to understand the role that Vedic-based Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) play in achieving the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Although there has been a significant amount of research done on the role that FBOs from various faith traditions have played in advancing the SDGs, the role of Vedic-based FBOs has received little attention. For example, Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), an organization inspired by Vedic philosophy, provides insight into the ways that the spiritual concepts of bhakti (devotional service), simple living, and respect for nature can support the advancement of the SDGs. This study fills a gap in the literature by examining the philosophies that underlie GEV's work, its key characteristics, thematic dimensions, translational action, and impact assessment, all from a qualitative perspective.

3.2 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs

From the theoretical frameworks identified in the literature, the following constructs were defined operationally as follows:

Vedic Principles: Through the identification of themes such as ecological harmony (e.g., cow protection and organic farming), community resilience (e.g., rural empowerment programs), and ethical governance (e.g., spiritual leadership models), this construct identifies how Vedic principles have been incorporated into GEV's activities and programs.

Alignment with UN SDGs: Through a process of matching GEV's projects to the UN SDGs, it was possible to assess the alignment between GEV's projects and the UN SDGs. For example, through food distribution, GEV supports SDG 2 (Zero Hunger); through water conservation, GEV supports SDG 6 (Access to Clean Water); and through biodiversity initiatives, GEV supports SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Thematic Dimensions: Using grounded theory, this construct identifies five thematic dimensions of GEV's work: People (community welfare), Planet (ecological stewardship), Prosperity (economic empowerment), Peace (spiritual conflict resolution), and Partnership (collaborative relationships with stakeholders).

Impact Assessment: Impact assessment is quantifiable through stakeholder perceptions and case examples. Future potential measures of impact could be based on quantitative indicators, such as the number of people who benefited from GEV's educational programs for youth or the number of gallons of water conserved through GEV's water conservation efforts.

3.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how Vedic-based FBOs, such as GEV, contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs. The research questions include:

- a) Why do Vedic-based FBOs support the UN SDGs?
- b) What features of Vedic-based FBOs contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs?

- c) Which thematic dimensions of GEV's work support the achievement of the UN SDGs?
- d) How do Vedic-based FBOs' thematic dimensions support the translation of ideas into actions?
- e) How should the impact of Vedic-based FBOs' work be measured?

3.4 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, exploratory research design to describe the mechanisms and processes through which Vedic-based FBOs achieve the UN SDGs. By focusing on a primary case study of GEV and referring to some initiatives of other Vedic-based FBOs in Mayapur and Vrindavan, the research design allows for in-depth, contextualized understanding. Grounded Theory methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) provided the framework for the iterative generation of conceptual categories, while Value-Focused Thinking (Keeney, 1992) enabled anchoring emerging themes in the values and priorities articulated by stakeholders.

3.5 Population and Sample

Population: The population of interest for this study consists of Vedic-based FBOs whose mission includes the promotion of sustainable development initiatives that support the UN SDGs. This population may consist of organizations that draw upon Vedic traditions and teachings, such as the Vedantic, Bhakti, or Yogic schools, and that contribute to the realization of the UN SDGs through initiatives related to environmental sustainability, education, health, and social welfare. Examples of organizations in this population may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Govardhan Ecovillage (Maharashtra)
- b) Vedic Farm Communities
- c) Yoga-based Rural Outreach Programs inspired by Vedic Philosophy
- d) Vedic Ashrams or Gurukuls engaged in Community Empowerment and Ecological Restoration

Sampling Strategy: The sample will be comprised of key stakeholders of Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), including leaders, volunteers, project managers, and beneficiaries of GEV's projects. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to recruit stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation of SDG-related initiatives at GEV. To gain a broad and inclusive representation of the views of stakeholders, maximum variation sampling will be employed to recruit stakeholders from diverse backgrounds (e.g., management vs. grassroots volunteers; youth vs. elders). In addition, snowball sampling will be employed within each stakeholder group to recruit additional relevant stakeholders through referrals and continued until thematic saturation is reached.

3.6 Participant Selection

Participant selection was based on whether they had a minimum of 5 years of affiliation with GEV and had knowledge of Vedic principles. Participants excluded from consideration were temporary visitors or those who were not stakeholders. The intended sample size is 20 participants, aiming for thematic saturation through semi-structured interviews, focused group discussions, and questionnaires.

3.7 Instrumentation

Data collection instrumentation included:

a) Semi-Structured Interview Guide: Semi-structured interview guides contained open-ended questions aimed at eliciting stakeholders' perspectives on Vedic principles, experiences in SDG-focused projects at GEV, and indicators of impact.

b) Focus Group Protocol: Focus groups provided opportunities for stakeholders to share their perspectives on the values, challenges, and success factors associated with the achievement of the SDGs through the application of Vedic principles.

c) Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed to elicit specific insights regarding GEV's progress toward the achievement of the SDGs through the application of Vedic principles.

3.8 Methods for Collecting Data

Methods used to collect data were:

Twelve semi-structured interviews with GEV leaders (45-60 minutes, virtual or in person)

Two focus group sessions (with 3-5 participants per session)

Eight participants who responded to the Questionnaire

Two site visits to GEV project locations (organic farms, water harvesting sites)

Secondary source review: GEV annual reports, UN SDG documents, and public interviews of GEV leaders.

Methods included obtaining informed consent, and the data collection was done in accordance with all applicable ethical standards.

3.9 Analyzing Data

Data Transcription & Familiarization: All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and then read repeatedly to achieve familiarity.

Open Coding (Grounded Theory): Transcripts and the questionnaire responses were coded to identify concepts relating to the faith values and SDG domains that emerged from the data.

A central narrative connecting Vedic principles to pathways for implementing the SDGs was developed using these codes.

Value-Focused Mapping: A framework by Keeney is applied to connect themes that emerged with stakeholders' prioritized values and with specific SDG targets.

Triangulation was used to ensure validity.

3.10 Limitations of the Research Design

This study has provided significant insight into how Vedic-based FBOs can contribute to achieving the United Nations SDGs; however, there are some limitations associated with the research design that are important to acknowledge in order to provide direction for future research. The primary methodological limitation of this study was that it relied on qualitative research methods and primarily utilized interviews and questionnaires, which provide a high degree of detail but may limit the extent to which the findings are generalizable to diverse Vedic contexts. Although this study

did track changes at GEV over time; the time constraints of the study prevented longitudinal tracking, although the evolving metrics of GEV suggest that GEV continues to have dynamic positive impacts. These limitations, inherent to an exploratory qualitative research design, do not diminish the validity of the findings, but they indicate that additional scope for the study could include, but not be limited to, detailed multi-site studies in different geographical locations.

3.11 Conclusion

The research design presented in this chapter provides a solid and systematic framework for researching the contributions of Vedic-based Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) with Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV) as the primary case study toward the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using a qualitative research design based upon grounded theory and value-focused thinking, the study provides a deep understanding of the theoretical basis for the philosophical alignment of Vedic FBOs with their operational characteristics, thematic dimensions, and ways to translate those characteristics into action and measure impacts. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and document analysis allow for rich contextual knowledge about how Vedic principles such as bhakti (devotion), dharma (moral obligation), and prakriti (reverence for nature) lead to the development of sustainable practices. Purposeful and snowball sampling increases the number of different perspectives, and thematic analysis ensures that emergent themes, such as ecological harmony and community resilience, are systematically identified and mapped to the SDGs' 5Ps framework (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership). This level of qualitative detail,

validated by GEV's accreditation by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), makes this research design a valid research instrument to answer the research questions and provides a foundation for developing an understanding of Vedic FBOs' holistic contributions to global sustainability while also providing opportunities for future quantitative and longitudinal extensions.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

4.1 Research Question One

Why do Vedic-based FBOs have an alignment with the UN SDGs?

The results from the qualitative data show that there is a substantial, both philosophical and operational, similarity between the principles of Vedic thought and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The principles of Vedic thought are derived from ancient Vedic texts (the Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Puranas, and Upanishads), and they emphasize concepts such as *sanatana-dharma* (eternal duty and interconnectedness), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *seva* (selfless service), and *Prakriti* (nature as divine). All of these principles reflect the holistic approach of the SDGs, especially the 5 Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership), creating a worldview where human prosperity cannot be separated from social and environmental harmony.

te api vā yadi tiṣṭanti

śapiṣye tān api dhruvam ||

vane asmin māmaka nityam

putravat parirakṣate |

patra aṅkura vināśāya

phala mūla abhavāya ca ||

Matang rishi says, “This forest of mine is always protected like my own son, and if the monkeys of Vali wish to stay behind in this forest alone for further

destruction of leaves or sprouts, or even for the non-existence of fruits and tubers of this forest, defiantly they too will be cursed.”

-VR 4.11.56-57

This verse from Kishkindha Kanda of Valmiki Ramayan provides a powerful example of an old environmental ethic that views nature as an extended part of one's family. The story begins when the powerful Vanara king, Vali, kills the buffalo demon, Dundubhi, and after killing him hurls the massive, bloodied corpse of the demon into the forest of Rishyamuka hill, on which lived the sage Matanga Rishi. In doing so, Vali also stains the land and sacred flora. The anger of the sage is not simply because the sacred area has been defiled, but rather because the destruction of the ecosystem that the sage has cared for has occurred. As a demonstration of the paternal love he feels for the forest, the Rishi describes the trees, sprouts, fruits, and tubers in the forest as his 'sons,' living beings that are protected by him. When Vali, through his actions, demonstrates a clear disregard for the care of the forest and shows a desire to destroy the 'leaves or sprouts,' Matanga Rishi places a total, life-threatening curse on Vali and his entire troop. The curse of Matanga Rishi was intended to protect his environmental sanctuary from further harm from the reckless power of Vali.

At GEV, leaders consistently highlighted that Vedic teachings view the Earth as a sacred entity (e.g., "Mother Earth," or *Bhumi*, or *Bhu Devi*), aligning directly with SDGs focused on environmental protection.

khurair̥ kṣuraprair̥ darayams tad āpa

utpāra-pāram̐ tri-parū rasāyām

dadarśa gām̐ tatra suṣupsur agre

yām jīva-dhānīm svayam abhyadhatta

sva-damṣṭrayoddhṛtya mahīm nimagnām

sa utthitaḥ samruruce rasāyāḥ

tatrāpi daityam gadayāpatantam

Sunābha-sandīpita-tīvra-manyuḥ

Lord Boar penetrated the water with His hooves, which were like sharp arrows, and found the limits of the ocean, although it was unlimited. He saw the earth, the resting place for all living beings, lying as it was in the beginning of creation, and He personally lifted it.

Lord Boar very easily took the earth on His tusks and got it out of the water.

Thus, He appeared very splendid. Then, His anger glowing like the Sudarśana wheel, He immediately killed the demon [Hiraṇyākṣa], although he tried to fight with the Lord.

-SB 3.13.30-31

This quote from the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* refers to the *Varāha* Avatāra (Boar Incarnation) of Lord Viṣṇu. A key feature of this story is the high priority of protecting the earth. Hiraṇyākṣa had violently dragged the entire earth (*Bhūmi*) into the cosmic ocean and drowned it in the bottomless waters, a symbolic action of adharmā that destroyed the base of creation. In response to the cries of the gods, Lord Viṣṇu took the form of the gigantic boar, *Varāha*, and used His sharp tusks to search for the submerged earth in the depths of the water. After finding it, He used His tusks to lift the entire earth out of the destructive waters and restore it back to its original

place. Finally, to ensure the safety of the earth and complete the task of preserving it, Lord *Varāha* killed the difficult-to-defeat demon *Hiraṇyākṣa* and demonstrated the importance of the protection of the earth as a divine responsibility.

One example is that the motivation for selfless work based upon the idea of *bhakti* (devotional service) causes GEV leaders to perform projects that help achieve the goal of SDG 1 (No Poverty) through empowering rural populations, benefiting over 150,000 people since 2010. While this is not coincidental, the Vedic principles promote a way of life that meets the needs of the present generation without harming future generations, similar to the definition of sustainable development presented in the Brundtland Report.

*īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ
yat kiñca jagatyām jagat
tena tyaktena bhujīthā
mā gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam*

Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and one should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.

-Ishopanishad Mantra 1

This verse from the *Īshopaniṣad* is the core of the Vedic principles for sustainable living and addresses the importance of balancing current needs with the needs of

future generations. The mantra begins with the recognition that "*īśāvāsyam idam sarvaṃ*," all things in the universe belong to the Supreme Being, and therefore no person can lay claim to being the sole owner or have the right to use the earth's natural resources unconditionally. Therefore, this sets up a general discouragement of the exploitation of the earth. Subsequently, the verse instructs "*tena tyaktena bhujīthā*", one should enjoy or take only what is assigned as their quota. The principle of non-possessive enjoyment and consumption limits the use of resources to the individual's needs and therefore naturally preserves them for the benefit of those that come after. Therefore, the principle of limited consumption aligns with the concept of sustainable development, using what one requires today without reducing the reserve of resources needed tomorrow. Data collected from other Vedic ecovillages also supported this conclusion. Among the primary reasons were

Spiritual Interconnectedness:

The Vedic idea of *abhed* (unity) supports SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) in that it encourages partnerships and collaboration, as seen in GEV's latest MoU with IIT Kanpur and IGBC in 2024 regarding green building innovation.

Ethical Imperative:

Ethical governance based in the principles of Karma Yoga (the action performed without attachment) is aligned with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions) since decision-making can be community driven.

Holistic Wellness:

yuktāhāra-vihārasya

yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu

yukta-svapnāvabodhasya

yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā

He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation, and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system.

-Bhagavad Gita 6.17

This verse supports the Vedic concept of body-mind-soul equilibrium as a basis of wellness and is compatible with contemporary health objectives (SDG 3); GEV has provided training to thousands each year through Ayurvedic and yoga programs. In this verse it is stated that the practice of yoga, which is the way to acquire inner wisdom (spiritual clarity), is only considered a "destroyer of distress" (*duḥkha-hā*) if one has adopted a moderate and regulated lifestyle. Moderation (*yukta*) of the practice of yoga must include not only the spiritual practice but also the regulation of all other activities that are physical and material: the manner of eating (*āhāra*), the manner of amusement/recreation (*vihāra*), the manner of work/activity (*ceṣṭasya karmasu*), and the cycles of sleep and awakening (*svapnāvabodhasya*). By regulating these areas of life, there will be a harmony of the body (by proper nourishment and rest) and the mind (by a balanced activity and recreation), thus creating the best possible conditions for the growth and progress of the soul and total health.

GEV's incorporation of all 17 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its philosophical approach is demonstrated through the available data e.g., GEV's nature preserve (a biodiversity area home to over 63 different bird species and 140 different plant species) exemplifies SDG 15 (Life on land), while

contributing indirectly to the achievement of other SDGs (e.g., SDG 13 (climate change)) through carbon-neutral practices. These commonalities stem from Vedic FBOs' focus on sustainable development; as compared to secular models, this focus is motivated by a desire to sustain the world spiritually.

4.2 Research Question Two

What are the key features in Vedic-based FBOs that promote UN SDGs?

As per the gathered data, there are various Vedic principles that support the United Nations' SDGs. Below are the main Vedic principles that promote the SDGs.

Dharma:

Dharma represents the Vedic principle of righteousness/duty. In simple terms, it means following a set of moral laws and performing one's duty so that one maintains social order. It is about maintaining justice, ethics, and the roles that each person has to ensure that people are treated fairly and that society remains stable. The importance of Dharma is shown throughout history. Yudhishtira followed Dharma during the dice game he lost to Shakuni because if he had broken his Dharma, he would have gone against the gods. He did this and eventually was able to conquer, which is told in the *Sabha Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. Similarly, Rama followed his Dharma when he honored his father's word of going to the jungle for fourteen years, even though he knew it meant giving up everything he loved and losing his freedom. He did this as it was in alignment with Dharma. This episode comes in the *Ayodhya Kanda* of the *Valmiki Ramayana*. Both of these examples demonstrate that following one's Dharma can lead to great rewards in the future.

Dharma relates to many of the SDGs through the implementation of ethical governance, such as SDG 16 (Justice); SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality); SDG 5 (Gender Equality); and SDG 8 (Decent Work). Govardhan Ecovillage exemplifies the Vedic principle of Dharma in rural development for over 50 villages, which fulfills SDG 16 through the transparency of their programs; SDG 10 with over 2000 women empowered; and SDG 5 through Self Help Groups (SHGs) and has benefited over 1100 families.

yoga-sthaḥ kuru karmāṇi

saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanañ-jaya

siddhy-asiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā

samatvaṁ yoga ucyate

Perform your duty equipoised, O Arjuna, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga.

- BG 2.48

Dharma encourages continuing the duties regardless of whether one succeeds or fails. The above verse from the Bhagavad Gita states that one should perform the duties without attachment or greed for results, but with equanimity; this approach aligns with the goals of SDG 12, which promotes responsible consumption of the world's resources. Therefore, even though there might have been little worldwide progress in developing the world as a result of responsible and limited usage of the world's natural resources, the duty of continuing to develop the world (not necessarily through accelerating the world's development and growth) should be done responsibly with

consideration of alternative and sustainable options, instead of viewing this as a failure and using the world's natural resources in an unsustainable way.

Ahimsa (Non-Violence):

The Vedic principle of ahimsa teaches us to avoid causing harm to any living being through our thoughts, words, or actions. This is based on an understanding that all living beings have a divine spark within them and are connected, as expressed in ancient texts like the Rigveda and Upanishads. In short, it means being compassionate and empathetic towards others in everyday life and refraining from physical, mental, or verbal aggression and resolving conflicts peacefully. Therefore, it promotes respect for nature and non-violent resolutions to conflicts, resulting in a harmonious way of living that is beneficial to society as a whole. One example of Ahimsa is the story of King Shibi in the Mahabharata, in which the king is tested by the gods Indra and Agni, who disguise themselves as a hawk and a dove. When the hawk asks the king for its flesh, Shibi offers himself instead of the dove, showing the ultimate self-sacrifice to uphold non-violence. This is told in the *Vana Parva*, chapter 197, as mentioned below:

tyaje prāṇān naiva dadyāṃ kapotaṃ

saumyo hyayaṃ kiṃ na jānāsi śyena |

yathā kleśaṃ mā kuruṣveha saumya

nāhaṃ kapotamarpayiṣye kathaṃcit || 18 ||

I will lay down my life, but I will not give it up to this pigeon. Falcon! Don't you know how naive this beautiful self is? Gentleman! Now you don't suffer in vain here. I will not give this pigeon into your hands. || 18 ||

atha sa dakṣiṇādūrorutkr̥tya

svamāmsapeśiṃ tulayā''dhārayat /

gurutara eva kapota āsīt || 21 ||

Then the king cut the meat from his right thigh and placed it on a scale, but when weighed with the dove, it turned out to be heavier. || 21 ||

punaranyamuñcakarta

gurutara eva kapotaḥ /

evaṃ sarvaṃ samadhikṛtya

śarīraṃ tulāyāmāropayāmāsa /

tat tathāpi gurutara eva kapota āsīt || 22 ||

The king cut the flesh of his body for the second time, but the dove remained heavy. Thus, gradually, he cut the meat of all his limbs and put it on the scales, but the pigeon remained heavy. || 22 ||

atha rājā svayameva tulāmāruroha /

na ca vyalīkamāsīd rājña etad

vṛttāntaṃ dr̥ṣṭvā trāta ityuktvā

prālīyata śyeno'tha rājā abravīt || 23 ||

Then the king himself climbed the scales. In doing so, they did not feel troubled. Seeing this incident, the falcon said, 'The pigeon's life has been saved. With that he disappeared. Now King Shibi said to the pigeon || 23 ||

Another example comes from the Aranya Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, where Lord Rama protects the sages in the forest from demons without unnecessary aggression, focusing on defensive action to preserve life. One more example comes from the Ramayan, Aranya Kand, where Sita suggests Ram not kill the evil demonic people of the Dandkaranya forest unnecessarily, as mentioned below:

*snehāt ca bahumānāt ca
smāraye tvām na śikṣaye |
na kathaṃcana sā kāryā
gṛhīta dhanuṣā tvayā || 3-9-24
buddhiḥ vairam vinā hantum
rākṣasān daṇḍaka āśritān |
aparādham vinā hantum
loko vīra na kāmāye || 3-9-25*

Sita ji says - "In affinity and in respect I am reminding but not tutoring you, and in anyway improper is that thought of yours to wield your bow to kill the demons dwelling in Dandaka without any enmity, oh, brave one, undesirable is the killing of offenceless.

Therefore, adhering to Ahimsa demonstrates both moral strength and courage in the face of adversity. Furthermore, this Vedic principle is aligned with multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that promote peaceful co-existence and environmental stewardship. For example, it supports SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through non-violent conflict resolution and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by supporting plant-based diets that reduce the risk of health

problems associated with animal products, and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through protecting biodiversity and preventing habitat destruction. Ahimsa has a holistic approach in that harming any part of the ecosystem will result in an imbalance in the natural order of things, similar to the SDGs' goal of achieving a balanced and sustainable global community. Today, organizations such as Govardhan Ecovillage in Maharashtra follow Ahimsa through their cow protection programs and animal shelters. They protect over 104 cows and other animals, including horses, donkeys, and sheep, without exploiting them. They use the cow's dung to create biogas and manure for their organic farming practices, which span 15+ acres. This practice does not only prevent harm to the animals but also helps fulfill SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by teaching over 10,000 farmers in non-violent and sustainable ways of growing food that is free from chemicals, SDG 15 by conserving biodiversity with over 65 bird species and 55 butterfly species in their Vrindavan Forest, and SDG 13 through carbon-neutral practices such as planting 150,000 trees. GEV has biogas plants, which reduce the need for fossil fuels. Additionally, their work has positively impacted the lives of over 150,000 people since 2010.

Satya (Truthfulness)

The Vedic principle of Satya refers to the unshakeable commitment to truth in speech, action, and thought. It means being truthful in all aspects of life, avoiding lying or exaggerating, and working to live with integrity so that one develops trust and moral clarity. Such conduct will help one grow personally and socially, as dishonesty destroys relationships and causes chaos. An excellent example of Satya is the story of King Harishchandra, who is tested by Sage Vishwamitra. To fulfill a promise made by Vishwamitra, Harishchandra loses his kingdom, sells his family into servitude, and

becomes a cremator. Eventually, Harishchandra redeems himself spiritually for keeping his word, as told in the *Markandeya Purana*, Chapter 7, as below:

rājovāca

brahmastāmapī dāsyāmi

dakṣiṇāṃ bhavato hyaham|

vriyatāṃ dvijaśārdūla

yastaveṣṭaḥ pratigrahaḥ || 26||

The Raja spoke - King Harishchandra said to sage Vishwamitra - O

brāhmana' I will indeed give your honour that fee Choose, O chief of the

dvijas, whatever present you desire.

viśvāmitra uvāca

sasāgarāṃ dharāmetā

sabhūbhr̥dyāmapattanām|

rājyaṃ ca sakalaṃ

vīrarathāśvagajasakulam || 27||

koṣṭhāgāraṃ ca kośaṃ ca

yaccānyadvidyate tava|

vinā bhāryā ca putraṃ ca

śarīraṃ ca tavānagha || 28||

dharmāṃ ca sarvadharmajñā

yo yāntamanugacchati |

bahunā vā kimuktena

sarvametat pradīyatām|| 29||

Sage Viśvāmitra spoke - Give me this earth, with its ocean, and with its mountains, villages and towns, and your entire kingdom, O warrior, with its multitude of chariots, horses, and elephants; also your treasury and treasure; and whatever else you possess, excepting your wife, and son and body, O sinless one! and excepting your virtue, which, O you that know all the virtues, follows its possessor when he moves. What need for me to say more? Let all this be granted me.

*prahr̥ṣṭenaiva manasā
so 'vikāramukho nṛpaḥ |
tasyar̥servacanaṃ śrutvā
tathetyāha kṛtāñjaliḥ || 30||*

The birds spoke - With gladdened mind the king Harishchandra, unperturbed in countenance, having heard the Rsi's speech, joining his hands respectfully replied, "So be it! "

Another episode from the Ramayana involves Lord Rama's adherence to his father's word, accepting exile without resentment to honor truth, as depicted in the Ayodhya Kanda.

*rudannāha priyam putraṃ
satyapāśena samyataḥ |
kaikeyā codyamānstu
mitho rājā tamabravīt || 2-34-30*

Prompted secretly by kaikeyi, the distressed king, tied up by fetters of truth, said weeping to that beloved son.

śreyase vṛddhaye tāta

punar āgamanāya ca |

gaccasva ariṣṭam avyagraḥ

panthānam akutaḥ bhayam || 2-34-31

"Oh, darling! Proceed for welfare, for advancement, and for coming again.

*Let your path of travel be auspicious, undistracted, and fearless from any
quarter."*

Satya encourages people to make sacrifices and promote a person's spiritual growth; Satya supports many aspects of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, Satya can support SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which aims to reduce corruption and promote accountability by creating an environment that is transparent and ethically governed. Similarly, Satya supports SDG 4 (Quality Education), which includes providing access to quality education and honest information/knowledge. Additionally, Satya may support SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which focuses on developing partnerships to create a global environment that works towards achieving all of the SDGs, as well as SDG 5 (Gender Equality), which includes creating an environment where individuals can have open and honest discussions about social issues and develop strong relationships.

Governments and institutions around the world are using the SDGs as a framework to build resilient communities, and similarly, *Satya* can also be used as a foundation to build these same types of communities. As such, the connection between Satya and

the SDGs is based on *Satya*'s role in building communities that work together to achieve the common good.

In a similar way, the actions taken at Govardhan Ecovillage reflect *Satya* in that they provide open and transparent ways of operating the village and providing educational opportunities to the residents and visitors of the village. They provide open access to data and processes related to sustainability as well as training for approximately 9,000 youth in honest, skill-based employment opportunities. These actions are reflective of several of the SDGs, including:

SDG 4 (Quality Education): Govardhan Ecovillage has provided approximately 1,000+ educational sessions in 50+ rural schools to benefit 9,000+ students.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Govardhan Ecovillage has empowered 1,450+ farmers to report honestly on income increases of up to 50%.

SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): Govardhan Ecovillage has developed partnerships with organizations like IIT Kanpur to develop green buildings and other projects that contribute to the development of a sustainable society.

Asteya (Non-Stealing)

The Vedic philosophy of *Asteya* emphasizes the importance of not taking anything that does not belong to you, which extends beyond simply not stealing someone else's property to not taking ideas, time, or other resources that do not belong to you. The idea of *Asteya* was first introduced in the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* and has been emphasized throughout Vedic philosophy as being essential to maintaining personal contentment. In simple terms, *Asteya* is about living with integrity by earning one's own money and respectably treating other people's belongings and not exploiting

them for one's own gain. By practicing Asteya, one cultivates a sense of inner peace and help reduce inequality among societies. Asteya promotes generosity and discourages greed and helps to ensure that there is equal distribution of resources within a community.

One example of *Asteya* is demonstrated in the Mahabharata when Yudhishtira refused to take advantage of resources that were not rightfully his while he and his brothers were in exile, and he did not deceive anyone, even though he and his family suffered greatly. This demonstrates the importance of acting ethically, even in difficult times.

The Srimad Bhagavatam describes another example of Asteya in the story of Bali Maharaja, who, after being deceived by Lord Vamana, still humbly surrendered everything he had to him without showing any resentment, as shown in the below verse:

śrī-balir uvāca

yady uttamaśloka bhavān mameritaṁ

vaco vyalīkaṁ sura-varya manyate

karomy ṛtaṁ tan na bhavet pralambhanam

padaṁ tṛtīyaṁ kuru śīrṣṇi me nijam||

Bali Mahārāja said: O best Personality of Godhead, most worshipable for all the demigods, if You think that my promise has become false, I shall certainly rectify matters to make it truthful. I cannot allow my promise to be false.

Please, therefore, place Your third lotus footstep on my head.

bibhemi nāham nirayāt pada-cyuto

na pāśa-bandhād vyasanād duratyayāt

naivārtha-kṛcchrād bhavato vinigrahād

asādhu-vādād bhṛśam udvije yathā

I do not fear being deprived of all my possessions, living in hellish life, being arrested for poverty by the ropes of Varuṇa or being punished by You as much as I fear defamation.

-SB 8.22.2-3

This demonstrates that one can practice detachment by letting go of things that do not truly belong to us. These examples demonstrate how practicing Asteya builds character and strength in the face of temptation. Practicing *asteya* aligns with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by eliminating exploitation and promoting fairness. Asteya can be linked to the following SDGs:

SDG 1 (No Poverty): Asteya promotes fair distribution of resources, thereby preventing poverty.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Asteya discourages unfair labor practices.

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): Asteya prevents individuals from being overly envious of others' resources and/or success.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): Asteya promotes responsible consumption and production by discouraging overconsumption.

This alignment exists because Asteya promotes the idea of sustainable equality and prevents individuals from hoarding resources, which is in line with the SDGs' focus on sustainable equity. At Govardhan Ecovillage, Asteya is practiced through the community-driven operation and management of resources. For example, their Wadi Agriculture Program has adopted approximately 1,450+ farmers and distributed 165,000+ horticulture saplings fairly. These actions fulfill SDG 1 (No Poverty) by lifting approximately 1,450+ rural households out of poverty. Furthermore, their livelihood initiatives have increased the income of approximately 250+ tribals by up to 50%. Finally, their plastic pyrolysis plant converts plastic waste into 18,720 liters of fuel annually, ensuring that the plastic waste is recycled in an ethical manner, thereby fulfilling SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

Brahmacharya (Self-Control Over Desire)

The Vedic practice of Brahmacharya, or restraint of one's senses and desires, is most commonly understood as a form of celibacy during a person's student years, but in reality can be practiced in all aspects of an individual's married life, according to the principles of the Bhagavad Gita on restraining oneself for the purpose of achieving a state of spiritual consciousness. Brahmacharya is about directing one's energy toward productive ends and avoiding unnecessary wastefulness in one's pursuit of desires, which will lead to greater clarity of mind and better physical and emotional health, and moral living. Ultimately, practicing Brahmacharya provides one with the ability to concentrate and to have the vital energy required to pursue one's own well-being and that of those around you.

One example of Brahmacharya is the story from the Bhagavad Gita in which Arjuna learns from Krishna the importance of self-control and restraint in order to achieve a state of unity with God (yoga); in particular, Krishna advocates moderation as mentioned below:

yuktāhāra-vihārasya

yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu

yukta-svapnāvabodhasya

yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā||

He who is regulated in his habits of eating, sleeping, recreation, and work can mitigate all material pains by practicing the yoga system.

-BG 6.17

Another example is from the Srimad Bhagavatam, which tells the story of Narada Muni, who lived a life of lifelong celibacy solely devoted to devotional service, as mentioned below:

antar bahiś ca lokāṁs trīn

paryemy askandita-vrataḥ

anugrahān mahā-viṣṇor

avighāta-gatiḥ kvacit||

Since then, by the grace of the almighty Viṣṇu, I travel everywhere without restriction both in the transcendental world and in the three divisions of the material world. This is because I am fixed in unbroken devotional service of the Lord.

deva-dattām imām vīṇām

svara-brahma-vibhūṣitām

mūrcchayitvā hari-kathām

gāyamānaś carāmy aham

And thus I travel, constantly singing the transcendental message of the glories of the Lord, vibrating this instrument called a vīṇā, which is charged with transcendental sound and which was given to me by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

-SB 1.6.31-32

Both of these examples demonstrate how Brahmacharya allows us to transcend our distractions and focus on higher goals. Brahmacharya also supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, it relates to the areas of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by reducing the risk of detrimental effects from uncontrolled behavior; SDG 4 (Quality Education) by improving an individual's ability to learn; SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by creating healthy relationships; and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by minimizing excessive consumption. The reason for this relationship is that Brahmacharya emphasizes finding a balance between one's desires and needs, which are in line with the goals of sustainable lifestyles outlined in the SDGs. Govardhan Ecovillage promotes the practice of Brahmacharya through its yoga and wellness programs, which offer 15+ residential courses at the Govardhan School of Yoga, with over 400 graduates practicing moderate living; Govardhan School of Yoga has fulfilled SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through providing Ayurvedic treatments to over 120,000+ individuals and conducting over 2500+ health camps; SDG 4 (Quality Education)

through providing skills training to over 9000+ youth; and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by empowering 3000+ women to start their own self-help groups; Govardhan Ecovillage reports 100 monthly consultations for holistic health, helping to reduce the number of people experiencing stress related to excessive consumption.

Aparigraha (Non-Possessiveness)

The Vedic principle of Aparigraha is based upon the idea of being detached from material possessions and non-accumulation, as illustrated in the *Isha Upanishad*, suggesting simplicity to prevent both greed and harm to the environment. In other words, it is the act of taking only what is needed, releasing attachment to things, and living simply to allow for spiritual development and sharing resources. By reducing envy and allowing for equal distribution of resources among community members, Aparigraha creates a sense of harmony within communities.

Two historical events that illustrate Aparigraha include the story from the Srimad Bhagavatam of King Bali, who donated everything to Lord Vamana without attachment and gave up his kingdom out of humility as mentioned below:

na pumān mām upavrajya

bhūyo yācitum arhati

tasmād vṛttikarīm bhūmim

vaṭo kāmaṁ pratīccha me||

O small boy, one who approaches me to beg something should not have to ask anything more, anywhere. Therefore, if You wish, You may ask from me as much land as will suffice to maintain You according to Your needs.

-SB 8.19.20

In addition, the Pandavas' exile in the Mahabharata illustrates the concept of non-attachment when they endured loss without resentment, as demonstrated in the *Vana Parva*.

Both of these historical accounts depict how Aparigraha enables individuals to overcome the bondage created by attachment to material goods. The principles of Aparigraha connect to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting sustainability through responsible consumption. Specifically, Aparigraha supports SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through the reduction of consumption patterns; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through the elimination of accumulation; SDG 13 (Climate Action) through reduced resource utilization; and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through preservation of natural resources. The connection to the SDGs is due to the anti-consumerist philosophy of Aparigraha, which aligns with the goals of the SDGs regarding resource efficiency. Govardhan Ecovillage demonstrates the practice of Aparigraha through its environmentally friendly methods of living and through models of non-accumulation. For instance, Govardhan Ecovillage produced over 400,000 compressed stabilized earth blocks locally for the construction of environmentally conscious buildings rated GRIHA 5-star, fulfilling SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through the creation of over 300,000 square feet of mud structures; SDG 13 through a 300 kW solar power plant that generates over 12,000 units of electricity daily; and SDG 15 through the planting of over 10,000+ trees representing 165+ species; Govardhan Ecovillage reports that over 90 million liters of rainwater are stored, thus eliminating the need for external water sources.

Dana (Generosity)

The Vedic principle of Dana promotes giving unselfishly and sharing resources with others in need, which is explained in the Rig Veda and Upanishads as an obligation that cleanses the givers and keeps society functioning. Dana is when one donates time, money, knowledge, or items without looking for something back, thus creating a culture of generosity that helps reduce inequality and creates bonds in communities. Dana also promotes seeing wealth as a responsibility to help benefit everyone and therefore promotes a more ethically prosperous way of life.

One well-known story about Dana comes from the Mahabharata, where Karna was the most generous person on earth and gave away his divine armor and earrings to Indra in disguise as a beggar, even though he knew it would cause him to die at the hands of another warrior in battle; Karna does this because he knows that the act of Dana is greater than his own life, as shown in the Vana Parva.

Additionally, there is a similar story in the Srimad Bhagavatam of King Rantideva, who during a famine shares all of his food and drink with guests who come to visit him, resulting in the king being granted divine intervention and therefore saving his kingdom as mentioned below:

viyad-vittasya dadato

labdham labdham bubhukṣataḥ

niṣkiñcanasya dhīrasya

sakuṭumbasya sīdataḥ

vyatīyur aṣṭa-catvāriṁśad
ahāny apibataḥ kila
ghṛta-pāyasa-saṁyāvam
toyam prātar upasthitam
kṛcchra-prāpta-kuṭumbasya
kṣut-trḍbhyām jāta-vepathoḥ
atithir brāhmaṇaḥ kāle
bhoktu-kāmasya cāgamat||

Rantideva never endeavored to earn anything. He would enjoy whatever he got by the arrangement of providence, but when guests came he would give them everything. Thus he underwent considerable suffering, along with the members of his family. Indeed, he and his family members shivered for want of food and water, yet Rantideva always remained sober. Once, after fasting for forty-eight days, in the morning Rantideva received some water and some foodstuffs made with milk and ghee, but when he and his family were about to eat, a brāhmaṇa guest arrived.

tasmai saṁvyabhajat so 'nnam
ādr̥tya śraddhayānvitaḥ
harim sarvatra saṁpaśyan
sa bhuktvā prayayau dvijaḥ

Because Rantideva perceived the presence of the Supreme Godhead everywhere, and in every living entity, he received the guest with faith and respect and gave him a share of the food. The brāhmaṇa guest ate his share and then went away.

iti prabhāṣya pānīyam

mriyamāṇaḥ pipāsayā

pulkasāyādadād dhīro

nisarga-karuṇo nṛpaḥ

Having spoken thus, King Rantideva, although on the verge of death because of thirst, gave his own portion of water to the caṇḍāla without hesitation, for the King was naturally very kind and sober.

-SB 9.21.3-5,6,14

Both of these examples show how one can sacrifice their loss for a greater dharma and, in doing so, be rewarded for their actions. The principles of Dana promote many of the same goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including reducing social and economic inequalities. Therefore, it is clear that Dana supports SDG 1 (No Poverty) through redistributing wealth, SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) through providing food to people in need, SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) by closing the gap between the rich and the poor, and SDG 17 (Strengthening Partnerships for the Goals) through working together to provide donations. All of these are aligned with Dana's focus on providing equal access to opportunities and support, which is also one of the primary goals of the SDGs as they focus on creating a more inclusive form of development.

At Govardhan Ecovillage, Dana is expressed through several different forms of charitable service, including free food distribution programs. Some of the programs include Annaksetra, which provides free meals to children daily and has distributed

over 2.1+ million complete meal plates since inception. This not only fulfills SDG 2 (End Hunger) by eliminating hunger for over 8,700 students and other members of the vulnerable population but also supports SDG 1 (No Poverty) by increasing the income of over 1,100+ tribal families by 30-35%. Govardhan Ecovillage also uses Dana to empower over 2,000 women in self-help groups and therefore fulfill SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) by creating equality for women, as well as enhance the quality of life for the over 18,000 individuals who have been treated at 1,800 health camps (and have received treatment for over 88,500 medical issues).

Tapas (Austerity)

The Vedic principle of Tapas promotes self-control through self-imposed austerity to develop inner strength, as described in the Yajur Veda and Yoga Sutras, where austerity purifies both the physical body and mental state to prepare for spiritual growth. In simpler terms, it refers to enduring hardships such as fasting or minimalism to suppress desire and cultivate endurance and focus. As a result, it develops willpower and discourages overconsumption, therefore improving personal and environmental well-being.

One of the best examples of tapas is from the Ramayana, where Lord Rama lives in exile in the forest for 14 years with very little comfort, and yet maintains his composure to fulfill his duties, as shown in the Ayodhya Kanda and Aranya Kanda.

In the Mahabharata, Bhishma takes a vow of celibacy and dedicates himself to a lifetime of austerity to serve his father's will, demonstrating his unyielding commitment, as mentioned below:

na hi janmaprabhṛtyuktaṃ mama kiṃcidihānṛtam |

yāvat prāṇā dhriyante vai mama dehaṃ samāśritāḥ ||

tāvanna janayiṣyāmi pitre kanyāṃ prayaccha me|

parityajāmbahaṃ rājyaṃ maithunaṃ cāpi sarvaśaḥ ||

ūrdhvaretā bhaviṣyāmi dāśa satyaṃ bravīmi te |

I have never told a lie since my birth. As long as I have life in me, I will not have children. I will completely renounce the kingdom and sex and will remain a celibate (a lifelong celibate).

-MB Adi Parva, Chapter 100, Verse 96

These two stories illustrate how tapas leads to a higher level of moral strength and success. Tapas corresponds with the UN SDGs, as it promotes sustainable lifestyle choices. It corresponds with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through reduction of waste, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through healthy habits, SDG 13 (Climate Action) through reduction of consumption, and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through a conservationist lifestyle. The relationship lies in Tapas' focus on moderation, which is a goal of the SDGs as they focus on sustainability and efficient use of natural resources.

Govardhan Ecovillage exhibits tapas through adopting austere practices in their daily lives to live sustainably. They achieve this through methods such as producing biogas

from cow manure and agricultural waste equivalent to 8500 kg of propane each year, achieving SDG 12 by converting 600+ kg of compost every day, and producing clean energy with their 300 kW solar plant, which produces 1200-1500 kWh of electricity every day, and therefore meeting SDG 7 (Access to Affordable and Reliable, Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts) through their zero-carbon footprint. Public data shows that their sustainable lifestyle has educated 4500+ young adults in sustainable practices.

Svadyaya (Self-Study)

Svadyaya represents a Vedic principle that encourages individuals to pursue lifelong learning through either scripture or self-reflection so they can increase their wisdom and then make decisions based upon truth. Through these two methods, Svadyaya helps develop an individual's intellect and spirit. It also develops an individual's ability to empathize and make better choices.

A good example of how Svadyaya can be applied is found in the Bhagavad Gita when Arjuna learns from Krishna while on the battlefield about the many dilemmas he faces, which lead him to find enlightenment as mentioned in the below verse:

kārpanya-doṣopahata-svabhāvaḥ

pr̥cchāmi tvāṁ dharma-sammūḍha-cetāḥ

yac chreyaḥ syān niścitaṁ brūhi tan me

śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam

Now I am confused about my duty and have lost all composure because of

miserly weakness. In this condition I am asking You to tell me for certain what

is best for me. Now I am Your disciple, and a soul surrendered unto You.

Please instruct me.

-BG 2.7

In the Srimad Bhagavatam, the self-study of devotion by Prahlada Maharaj leads to divine protection even though he was facing adversity. This is illustrated in Canto 7, chapters 5-8.

Both of these stories are examples of the positive transformation that Svadhyaya can cause. By providing education and raising awareness, Svadhyaya is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, Svadhyaya supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by encouraging continued learning, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) through developing ethical values, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by allowing for self-reflection and empowerment of all genders, and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through forming educated partnerships. As such, Svadhyaya is similar to the SDGs in that both are working toward creating a society with knowledgeable individuals. Govardhan Ecovillage embodies the principle of Svadhyaya through its Govardhan School of Sustainability, which conducts over 1,000 educational programs in 50 schools benefitting over 8,700 students and provides education in organic farming to over 10,000 farmers.

Additionally, through their school, Govardhan Ecovillage fulfills SDG 4 through over 70 college visits and 45 internships, SDG 16 through the promotion of value-based education, and SDG 5 through the establishment of 200 self-help groups benefitting 2000+ women.

Santosha (Contentment)

Santosha is another Vedic principle, which teaches people to find contentment in what they have and avoid greed. The principles of Santosha are discussed in the Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita. Santosha, in simple terms, is the cultivation of inner joy regardless of external circumstances to reduce stress and consumerism. Santosha promotes the ability to live sustainably and find mental peace, as it reduces the need for excessive desires.

One example of Santosha is when Vidura is exiled and maintains his contentment and continues to provide wise counsel to Dhritarashtra and does not become attached to power, as mentioned in the below verses:

viduras tad abhipretya

dhṛtarāṣṭram abhāṣata

rājan nirgamyatām śīghram

paśyedaṁ bhayam āgatam

Mahātmā Vidura knew all this, and therefore he addressed Dhṛtarāṣṭra,

saying: My dear King, please get out of here immediately. Do not delay. Just

see how fear has overtaken you.

agnir nisṛṣṭo dattaś ca

garo dārāś ca dūṣitāḥ

hṛtaṁ kṣetraṁ dhanam yeṣāṁ

tad-dattair asubhiḥ kiyat

There is no need to live a degraded life and subsist on the charity of those whom you tried to kill by arson and poisoning. You also insulted their married wife and usurped their kingdom and wealth.

evaṁ rājā vidureṇāmujena

prajñā-cakṣur bodhita ājamīḍhaḥ

chittvā sveṣu sneha-pāśān draḍhimno

niścakrāma bhrātr-sandarśitādhvā

Thus Mahārāja Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the scion of the family of Ajamīḍha, firmly convinced by introspective knowledge [prajñā], broke at once the strong network of familial affection by his resolute determination. Thus he immediately left home to set out on the path of liberation, as directed by his younger brother Vidura.

-SB 1.13.18,24,29

Another example of Santosha is when Sita finds contentment while being held captive in Lanka and focuses on her devotion to Lord Rama in the Sundara Kanda of the Ramayana.

These examples demonstrate the strength of Santosha in times of adversity. Santosha aligns with the UN SDGs by promoting wellness and equity. Santosha supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through the reduction of stress, SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption) through the limitation of excess consumption, SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) through non-covetous attitudes, and SDG 13 (Climate Action) through reduced footprints. At Govardhan Ecovillage, Santosha is demonstrated

through their minimalistic way of life on 100 acres of land, with their residents practicing contentment through their participation in spiritual programs. Govardhan Ecovillage fulfills SDG 3 through their Ayurveda Center, SDG 12 through their zero-waste system, and SDG 10 through the uplift of 1100+ tribal families with a 30-35% increase in their incomes. Since 2010, records indicate that Govardhan Ecovillage has energized 150,000+ lives.

Saucha (Purity)

Saucha is a Vedic principle that emphasizes cleanliness of the body, mind, and environment, as described in the Yoga Sutras and the Vedic rituals for hygiene. In simple terms, Saucha means maintaining purity through cleanliness of the body, clean thinking, and eco-friendly habits to create clarity and health. Saucha prevents illness and creates harmony between humans and nature.

In the Srimad Bhagavatam, Akrura purifies himself through bathing and meditation while taking Krishna from Vrindavan to Mathura, as mentioned below:

akrūras tāv upāmantrya

niveśya ca rathopari

kālindyā hradam āgatya

snānam vidhi-vad ācarat

Akrūra asked the two Lords to take Their seats on the chariot. Then, taking Their permission, he went to a pool in the Yamunā and took his bath as enjoined in the scriptures.

nimajjya tasmīn salile

japan brahma sanātānam

tāv eva dadṛśe 'krūro

rāma-kṛṣṇau samanvitau

While immersing himself in the water and reciting eternal mantras from the

Vedas, Akrūra suddenly saw Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa before him.

-SB 10.39.40-41

In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas maintain their minds pure during their time in exile and do not harbor vengeance, as described in the Vana Parva.

These examples represent the holistic benefits of Saucha. Saucha aligns with the UN SDGs through creating health and sustainability. Saucha supports SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through cleaning of the environment. Saucha is related to the SDGs because Saucha emphasizes the importance of purity, which is consistent with the hygienic and eco-friendly goals of the SDGs. Govardhan Ecovillage implements Saucha through their waste management program, which converts organic waste to 600+ kg of compost daily and plastic to pyro-oil. Govardhan Ecovillage fulfills SDG 6 with soil biotechnology, which recycles 120,000 liters of sewage daily; SDG 3 through conducting 1800 health camps for 88,500 patients; and SDG 15 through Vrindavan Forest with 140+ plant species. Data from Govardhan Ecovillage indicates that 110+ million liters of rainwater are collected.

Ishvara Pranidhana (Surrender to Divine)

Ishvara Pranidhana, the Vedic concept of surrendering to a higher power, can be seen throughout the Yoga Sutras and Bhagavad Gita as well as in other ancient Hindu texts. Surrender to a higher power allows one to gain the trust of divine will, reduce ego, and act with faith to obtain inner peace. Humility and purposeful living are also key components to the practice of surrender.

A great example of how surrender was used for success is when Arjuna surrendered himself to Krishna as guru and then gained victory, as mentioned below:

sarva-dharmān parityajya

mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja

ahaṁ tvām sarva-pāpebhyo

mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ

Krishna tells Arjuna, "Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear."

-BG 18.66

Hanuman's surrender allowed him to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks such as crossing the ocean in the Sundara Kanda of the Ramayana.

These examples of the use of surrender show the empowering nature of surrender and how it relates to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

Through surrendering to a higher power, an individual can develop resilience, which helps them to adapt and thrive in today's world. Surrender can help support three of the UN SDGs: SDG 3 (Health) by providing mental peace, SDG 16 (Peace) by

creating harmony among people and communities, and SDG 13 (Climate) by allowing an individual to become a faithful steward of the earth. Additionally, surrender can bring people together to work toward a common goal, supporting SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Karma (Action and Consequences)

The Vedic principle of Karma, as expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, states that if one performs one's duties with responsibility and detachment, one will receive favorable outcomes. This encourages individuals to complete their obligations to others and themselves in a selfless manner.

As stated in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna to perform all actions without attachment to the outcome. He stresses the importance of ethical responsibility as mentioned below:

karmaṇy evādhikāras te

mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karma-phala-hetur bhūr

mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.

-BG 2.47

In Srimad Bhagavatam (Canto 1), King Parikshit performs his duties as a king by protecting the innocents from the aggressors. His story illustrates the interconnected cycle of action and consequences.

Karma has many connections to several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Karma has connections to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the encouragement of individuals to have responsible livelihoods. Karma has connections to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through the promotion of sustainable and responsible consumption. Karma has connections to SDG 13 (Climate Change) through its encouragement of environmentally conscious actions and attitudes. Karma has connections to SDG 4 (Quality Education) through the sharing of knowledge about responsible and sustainable practices. At Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), Karma is practiced by providing education to farmers on sustainable agricultural practices, thus providing a better life for the farmer. GEV has achieved an 80% youth placement rate to support SDG 8 and has implemented recycling programs to support SDG 12. GEV has planted 131,000 plants and conducted karma-based workshops to educate and raise awareness about sustainability, contributing to SDGs 4 and 13.

Bhakti (Devotion)

The Vedic principle of Bhakti, or loving devotion to God, as expressed in the Srimad Bhagavatam, teaches us to emotionally surrender to God to find inner peace and spiritual fulfillment. Bhakti is exemplified in Srimad Bhagavatam by Shukdev Goswami's Vedic insights to Parikshit Maharaj as mentioned below:

vāsudeve bhagavati

bhakti-yogaḥ prayojitaḥ

janayaty āśu vairāgyam

jñānam ca yad ahaitukam

By rendering devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, one immediately acquires causeless knowledge and detachment from the world.

-SB 1.2.7

Bhakti creates peace and unity within communities. Bhakti aligns with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through the promotion of mental and physical health and wellness through spiritual practices. Bhakti aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by fostering harmony and peaceful relationships between communities. Bhakti aligns with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by bringing people together to work collaboratively and create a sense of community. Bhakti aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) through the sharing of spiritual knowledge. At Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), Bhakti is demonstrated through the use of temple activities and yoga programs. Over 120,000 people benefit from the Ayurveda-based wellness initiatives at GEV, which contribute to SDG 3. GEV engages 350 students annually in Bhakti-centered events, which reinforce community bonding and educational outreach, contributing to SDG 16.

Jnana (Knowledge)

Jnana, the Vedic pursuit of true knowledge as expressed in the Upanishads, provides an opportunity for individuals to achieve liberation through the process of

understanding the self and the universe. Jnana is illustrated by Uddhava's learning journey in Srimad Bhagavatam as mentioned below:

śrī-śuka uvāca

ity ādiṣṭo bhagavatā

mahā-bhāgavato nṛpa

uddhavaḥ praṇipatyāha

tattvaṁ jijñāsur acyutam

Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmi said: O King, the Supreme Personality of Godhead,

Lord Kṛṣṇa, thus instructed His pure devotee Uddhava, who was eager to

receive knowledge from the Lord. Uddhava then offered obeisances to the Lord

and spoke as follows.

-SB 11.7.13

Jnana provides the necessary discernment to make sustainable decisions. Jnana aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) through the promotion of knowledge dissemination. Jnana aligns with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) through the application of innovative ideas. Jnana aligns with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through the sharing of knowledge and information. Jnana aligns with SDG 13 (Climate Action) through the encouragement of informed and educated decisions regarding the environment. At Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), the Govardhan School of Sustainability (GSOS) provides education to over 8,700 students in Vedic and sustainable practices, contributing to SDG 4. GSOS is developing green technologies like solar systems for SDG 9 and hosting 45+ internship opportunities each year to

produce research outputs that advance sustainable innovation and partnerships, contributing to SDG 17.

Vairagya (Detachment)

Vairagya, the Vedic principle of non-attachment, as expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, provides the opportunity for individuals to experience freedom from material desires and live a simple and sustainable lifestyle. Vairagya is exemplified by King Bharata's renunciation in Srimad Bhagavatam, as mentioned below:

śrī-śuka uvāca

atha kasyacid dvija-varasyāṅgiraḥ-pravarasya

śama-dama-tapaḥ-svādhyāyādhyayana-tyāga-santoṣa-titikṣā-praśraya-vidyān

asūyātma-jñānānanda-yuktasyātma-sadrśa-śruta-śīlācāra-rūpaudārya-guṇā

nava sodaryā aṅgajā babhūvur mithunaṁ ca yavīyasyām bhāryāyām yas tu

tatra pumāṁs taṁ parama-bhāgavataṁ rājarṣi-pravaram bharatam

utsṛṣṭa-mṛga-śarīraṁ carama-śarīreṇa vipratvaṁ gatam āhuḥ.

Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: My dear King, after giving up the body of a deer, Bharata Mahārāja took birth in a very pure brāhmaṇa family. There was a brāhmaṇa who belonged to the dynasty of Aṅgirā. He was fully qualified with brahminical qualifications. He could control his mind and senses, and he had studied the Vedic literatures and other subsidiary literatures. He was expert in giving charity, and he was always satisfied, tolerant, very gentle, learned and nonenvious. He was self-realized and engaged in the devotional service of the Lord. He remained always in a trance. He had nine equally qualified sons by his first wife, and by his second

wife he begot twins, a brother and a sister, of which the male child was said to be the topmost devotee and foremost of saintly kings, Bharata Mahārāja. This, then, is the story of the birth he took after giving up the body of a deer.

tatrāpi svajana-saṅgāc ca bhṛśam udvijamāno bhagavataḥ

karma-bandha-vidhvamsana-śravaṇa-smaraṇa-guṇa-vivaraṇa-caraṇāravinda

-yugalaṁ manasā vidadhad ātmanaḥ pratighātam āśaṅkamāno

bhagavad-anugraheṇānusmṛta-sva-pūrva-janmāvalir ātmānam

unmatta-jaḍāndha-badhira-svarūpeṇa darśayām āsa lokasya.

Due to his being especially gifted with the Lord's mercy, Bharata Mahārāja could remember the incidents of his past life. Although he received the body of a brāhmaṇa, he was still very much afraid of his relatives and friends who were not devotees. He was always very cautious of such associations because he feared that he would again fall down. Consequently, he manifested himself before the public eye as a madman, dull, blind, and deaf, so that others would not try to talk to him. In this way he saved himself from bad association.

Within, he was always thinking of the lotus feet of the Lord and chanting the Lord's glories, which save one from the bondage of fruitive action. In this way he saved himself from the onslaught of nondevotee associates.

-SB 5.9.1-3

Vairagya fosters contentment and reduces overconsumption. Vairagya aligns with SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through the encouragement of minimalistic practices. Vairagya aligns with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by reducing stress associated with overconsumption. Vairagya aligns with SDG 10

(Reduced Inequalities) through the reduction of greed-driven disparities. Vairagya aligns with SDG 15 (Life on Land) through the protection of the environment. At Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), Vairagya inspires a simple-living ethos, and GEV has achieved zero-waste systems, contributing to SDG 12. GEV has increased the biodiversity in the Vrindavan Forest (home to 63+ bird species) through environmental conservation efforts, contributing to SDG 15. Detachment practices are integrated into community workshops to inspire sustainable thinking.

Seva (Selfless Service)

The Vedas emphasize selfless service, called Seva, which is defined as a service to others that does not have an element of ego. Seva is about assisting other people to help the community as a whole.

An example of this is when Hanuman served his master Rama with devotion in the Ramayana's Kishkindha Kanda, as mentioned below:

bhikṣurūpaṃ parityajya

vānaraṃ rūpamāsthitaḥ |

pr̥ṣṭhamārōpya tau vīrau

jagāma kapikuñjaraḥ ||

(Then Hanumān), the elephant among Vānaras, abjured his guise of a

mendicant, took his original Vānara form, and proceeded, carrying the Veeras

(Ram and Laxman) on his back.

-VR 4.4.34

The principles of Seva are connected to many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some examples include SDG 1 (no poverty) to help improve the lives of the poor, SDG 3 (good health and well-being) to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, SDG 17 (partnership for the goals) to work together toward common goals, and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) to build resilient cities and communities. The health camps at GEV are an example of Seva and have provided medical care to over 88,500 patients (SDG 3). The GEV also has a Wadi program, which empowers tribespeople and helps them to achieve their full potential (SDG 1). GEV has many volunteer-run camps each year, and these camps increase the connectivity of the local community and its ability to grow and develop in a sustainable manner.

Yajna (Offerings)

Yajna is a Vedic ritualistic offering to maintain harmony between the cosmos and the environment as described in the Vedas.

These rituals are used to restore the equilibrium of nature, as demonstrated in the

Yajna of Daksha as mentioned below:

vaiṣṇavam yajña-santatyai

tri-kapālam dvijottamāḥ

puroḍāśam niravapan

vīra-saṁsarga-śuddhaye

Thereafter, in order to resume the activities of sacrifice, the brāhmaṇas first arranged to purify the sacrificial arena. Then they arranged to offer into the fire the oblations known as puroḍāśa.

-SB 4.7.17

Yajna relates to many of the SDGs. For example, Yajna can be connected to SDG 13 (climate action) because it promotes sustainability; SDG 15 (life on land) because it preserves ecosystems; SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) because it uses eco-friendly methods for obtaining energy; and SDG 2 (zero hunger) because it provides food through agricultural offerings. GEV uses the concept of Yajna to promote sustainable agriculture (SDG 15), including forest conservation in the Vrindavan Forest, and harvesting over 110 million liters of water per year, which will contribute to achieving SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation). Additionally, GEV has developed 300 KW of solar energy, which will help the organization meet the requirements of SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy). GEV performs regular Yajna ceremonies, which promote awareness of the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with the natural world.

Pranayama (Control of the Breath)

Pranayama, the regulation of the breath through the use of breath control techniques as mentioned below, increases the efficiency of the body's systems, leading to improved physical and mental well-being and increasing the individual's ability to concentrate and learn.

tasmin sati shvasa prashvsayoh gati vichchhedah pranayamah||49||

*bahya abhyantara stambha vrittih desha kala sankhyabhiih paridrishtah
dirgha sukshmah||50||*

bahya abhyantara vishaya aksepi chaturthah||51||

tatah kshiyate prakasha avaranam||52||

dharanasu cha योग्याता मानसाह||53||

Once a steady and comfortable posture has been achieved, one can slow and suspend the movements of breath through the practice of pranayama.

Pranayama consists of inhalation, exhalation, and the pauses between. These movements become lengthened and refined through the observation of location, duration, and number. A fourth stage of pranayama transcends the inbreath and the outbreath. That pranayama unveils the light. And the mind develops the capacity for concentration.

-Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 2.49-53

Therefore, pranayama is connected to several of the SDGs. For instance, it can relate to SDG 3 (good health and well-being) since it improves overall health, SDG 4 (quality education) since it enhances one's ability to learn, and SDG 13 (climate action) since it increases awareness of the need for individuals to make environmentally responsible decisions. GEV uses Pranayama as part of their wellness programs and trains 400 graduates per year who can assist in meeting the needs of SDG 3. In addition, the classes conducted by GEV improve educational performance (SDG 4) and increase students' awareness of how to live sustainably, which contributes to climate resilience.

Tyaga (Renunciation)

Tyaga in Hinduism is defined as voluntary detachment from material objects or possessions and is described in the Bhagavad Gita when Krishna instructs Arjuna to perform tasks while avoiding attachment to their outcomes. Tyaga is about releasing ourselves from unessential, ego-based pursuits and accumulation of items in our lives to be able to focus on more important goals like service and self-realization. Through Tyaga, one reduces the burden of stress associated with having too much and promotes simplicity. Additionally, Tyaga fosters resource sharing between people, which is an effective way to create a world that is more balanced and peaceful as opposed to being driven by greed and possessiveness. Therefore, by renouncing the things one does not need, one is able to find more contentment and contribute to the benefit of society without the bondage of material expectations.

An illustration of Tyaga is found in the Srimad Bhagavatam. In this story, King Bharata, after being instructed to leave behind his throne and kingdom, lived in the forest as a hermit to seek spiritual enlightenment; however, he was tested by a deer, which led him to reincarnation and eventually to his liberation. His story is told in the Srimad Bhagavatam as mentioned below:

śrī-śuka uvāca

bharatas tu mahā-bhāgavato yadā bhagavatāvani-tala-paripālanāya

sañcintitas tad-anuśāsana-paraḥ pañcajanīm viśvarūpa-duhitaram upayame.

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued speaking to Mahārāja Parīkṣit: My dear King,

Bharata Mahārāja was a topmost devotee. Following the orders of his father,

who had already decided to install him on the throne, he began to rule the

earth accordingly. When Bharata Mahārāja ruled the entire globe, he followed the orders of his father and married Pañcajanī, the daughter of Viśvarūpa.

*evam varṣāyuta-sahasra-paryantāvasita-karma-nirvāṇāvasaro
'dhibhujyamānam sva-tanayebhyo riktham pitṛ-paitāmahaṁ yathā-dāyam
vibhajya svayam sakala-sampan-niketāt sva-niketāt pulahāśramaṁ
pravavrāja.*

At an appropriate time, he retired from family life and divided the wealth he had received from his forefathers among his sons. He left his paternal home, the reservoir of all opulence, and started for Pulahāśrama, which is situated in Hardwar. The śālagrāma-śilās are obtainable there.

*tasmin vāva kila sa ekalah pulahāśramopavane
vividha-kusuma-kisalaya-tulasikāmbubhiḥ kanda-mūla-phalopahāraiś ca
samīhamāno bhagavata ārādhanaṁ vivikta uparata-viṣayābhilāṣa
upabhṛtopaśamaḥ parām nirvṛtim avāpa.*

In the gardens of Pulaha-āśrama, Mahārāja Bharata lived alone and collected a variety of flowers, twigs, and tulasī leaves. He also collected the water of the Gaṇḍakī River, as well as various roots, fruits and bulbs. With these he offered food to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vāsudeva, and, worshiping Him, he remained satisfied. In this way his heart was completely uncontaminated, and he did not have the least desire for material enjoyment. All material desires vanished. In this steady position, he felt full satisfaction and was situated in devotional service.

-SB 5.7.1,8,11

Another example of Tyaga is found in the Mahabharata. After the war, Yudhisthira considered giving up the throne to alleviate the pain he experienced because of the loss of so many soldiers; however, he was encouraged by Bhishma to continue ruling with detachment.

These stories illustrate the requirement of courage to detach from worldly commitments and pursue divine ones, many times facing challenges that will refine one's soul. The Vedic philosophy of Tyaga has significant parallels to numerous United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. For example, Tyaga supports the goal of responsible consumption and production by reducing materialism and subsequently decreasing over-consumption and waste (SDG 12). Tyaga also contributes to the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10) by encouraging the act of sharing and the non-hoarding of resources to narrow the economic gap between different groups of people. Furthermore, Tyaga promotes climate action (SDG 13) by minimizing the footprint on the environment through simpler forms of living, and Tyaga supports the preservation of life on land (SDG 15) by discouraging harmful exploitation of the earth. The connection between Tyaga and the SDGs stems from the fact that both emphasize a selfless form of living and sustainable behavior that prioritizes the health of the planet over individual gain, resulting in increased global equity and resilience.

In modern-day examples, Govardhan Ecovillage exemplifies Tyaga through its community-oriented, low-materialist lifestyle of renunciation of materialistic and

resource-intensive activities. As an example, they have produced over 400,000 compressed stabilized earth blocks for the construction of their green buildings, covering nearly 300,000 sq ft. This represents a reduction in excessive material use and has earned them GRIHA 5-star ratings. This demonstrates fulfillment of SDG 12 by utilizing all organic cow dung and agricultural waste to produce over 600+ kg of compost per day for on-site use; SDG 10 through providing skills to over 1,100 tribal families, which has resulted in a 30-35% increase in family incomes without causing exploitative growth; SDG 13 through the utilization of a 300 kW solar panel system, which produces 1200-1500 kWh per day, resulting in carbon neutrality within two years; and SDG 15 through their maintenance of a 15-acre Vrindavan Forest, which is home to 63+ bird species and 140+ plant species.

Titiksha (Endurance)

Titiksha, a central tenet in the Vedas, relates to the long-term ability to endure adverse conditions and duality, such as hot and cold, joy and sorrow, and other experiences of hardship with a lack of complaining and resistance.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes this capacity to be steadfast in the face of adversity as an attribute of the steady yogi and contributes to both spiritual resilience and fortitude.

As described above, titiksha is essentially cultivating the ability to be tolerant and persevering when dealing with hardships and difficulties in our lives, to see these as opportunities to grow rather than as potential sources of despair, which promotes mental and emotional stability, reduces the propensity for reactive behaviors, and

provides a framework to continue to follow principles of right living during times of hardship, ultimately contributing to a person having the strength to be compassionate toward those experiencing hardships as well. This concept promotes seeing the suffering one experiences as transitory and fosters a mindset that can adapt to changing circumstances and still remain balanced.

A fine example of this is found in the Ramayana when Sita was held captive by Ravana in Lanka and endured this difficult situation with unyielding patience and faith in Rama, refusing to fall prey to Ravana's attempts at seduction and maintaining her virtue, which ultimately led to divine intervention as told in the Sundara Kanda and Yuddha Kanda.

Another example of this is the boy Dhruva, who endured severe austerity in the forest in order to find the Lord, and in doing so had to face many dangers, including wild animals and the elements, which ultimately resulted in his vision of Vishnu, as mentioned below:

maitreya uvāca

evaṃ sañjalpitaṃ mātur

ākarnyārthāgamam vacaḥ

sanniyamyātmanātmānam

niścakrāma pituḥ purāt

The great sage Maitreya continued: The instruction of Dhruva Mahārāja's mother, Sunīti, was actually meant for fulfilling his desired objective.

Therefore, after deliberate consideration and with intelligence and fixed determination, he left his father's house.

-SB 4.8.24

Both of these examples demonstrate how titiksha transforms what would otherwise be impediments or barriers to achieving divine favor and self-mastery. Titiksha has strong correlations to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly through providing resilience in vulnerable communities; Titiksha aligns with SDG 1 (No Poverty) in that it allows individuals to endure economic hardships with dignity; it aligns with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through the development of mental fortitude in the face of stress; it aligns with SDG 13 (Climate Action) through adapting to environmental changes; and it aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through the promotion of non-violent patience in the face of conflict. The common thread among all of these is that Titiksha develops endurance and supports the SDGs' goal of creating adaptive and inclusive societies that are able to withstand global challenges such as climate-related disasters.

Govardhan Ecovillage exemplifies titiksha through its rural development programs, where residents and beneficiaries of these programs develop and practice adaptations to natural challenges through sustainable practices, such as harvesting over 110 million liters of rainwater in the form of rainwater collected in ponds and open wells to alleviate water scarcity. Through this practice, Govardhan Ecovillage fulfills SDG 1 (No Poverty) by improving the resilience and income of over 1,100 tribal families; fulfills SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through various health initiatives, including conducting 1,800+ health camps that have served approximately 88,500+

patients; fulfills SDG 13 (Climate Action) through using biogas plants and converting waste to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and fulfills SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting peaceful community service projects that have positively impacted the lives of over 150,000+ people since 2010.

Shraddha (Faith)

The Vedic principle of Shraddha advocates for the cultivation of deep faith and trust in spiritual concepts, scripture, and divine guidance, as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna states that the depth of one's faith will determine the quality of one's character and the path they follow; therefore, it is essential for devotion and morality. In simpler terms, Shraddha is the cultivation of steadfast belief in higher principles and the unseen, which can act as motivation, stability, and direction in life and enable people to continue to act morally and ethically even when facing doubt or challenge and find comfort in times of difficulty, ultimately resulting in spiritual growth and harmony based on trust. This principle can foster authenticity in practices and transform abstract ideas into real-life applications.

One illustration of Shraddha can be found in the Srimad Bhagavatam, where Prahlada's unshakeable faith in Vishnu allowed him to endure the torture at the hands of his father and ultimately led to the appearance of Narasimha as depicted in the following verse:

śrī-prahrāda uvāca

kaumāra ācāret prājño

dharmān bhāgavatān iha

durlabham mānuṣam janma

tad apy adhruvam arthadam

Prahlāda Mahārāja said: One who is sufficiently intelligent should use the human form of body from the very beginning of life, in other words, from the tender age of childhood, to practice the activities of devotional service, giving up all other engagements. The human body is most rarely achieved, and although temporary like other bodies, it is meaningful because in human life one can perform devotional service. Even a slight amount of sincere devotional service can give one complete perfection.

-SB 7.6.1

Another example can be found in the Ramayana, where Hanuman's faith in Rama enabled him to jump across the ocean to Lanka and locate Sita, as found in the Sundara Kanda.

Both stories illustrate how Shraddha can invoke divine protection and facilitate the impossible. Shraddha also links to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in that it inspires committed action to promote global good; it aligns with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through collaborative faith-based projects; SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions) through trust in ethical systems; SDG 13 (Climate Change) by motivating individuals to take environmental responsibility; and SDG 4 (Quality Education) through faithful learning. The link between Shraddha and the SDGs relates to both the role of Shraddha in facilitating long-term commitment to a cause and the role of the SDGs in requiring the participation of multiple stakeholders in a global partnership for environmental and personal sustainability.

Govardhan Ecovillage, rooted in Krishna consciousness, demonstrates Shraddha through faith-driven sustainability, such as their temples and devotion programs, which motivate 100+ volunteers. This demonstration of Shraddha has fulfilled SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through partnerships such as the 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IIT Kanpur and IGBC; SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions) through community service that fosters peace among 150,000+ recipients; SDG 13 (Climate Change) through the use of solar and biogas programs that have achieved carbon neutrality; and SDG 4 (Quality Education) through 1,000+ educational sessions in 50 schools that benefited 8,700+ students.

Samadhi

The concept of Samadhi, in the Veda, focuses on achieving a balanced and concentrated state of mind while remaining undistracted in all aspects of life. This idea is present in many Vedantic sadhanas, such as those described in the Tattva Bodha, which allow for continuous focus on truth without distraction or wavering. For example, Samadhi can be understood as achieving a mentally even keel and a singular point of concentration so that one can navigate life's challenges and obstacles calmly. Achieving a mentally even keel and singular point of concentration will improve one's ability to make decisions, reduce one's level of anxiety, and enable one to continue pursuing one's goals effectively, leading to a greater degree of personal harmony and contribution to society. Therefore, Samadhi enables one to channel one's purpose and calmness to prevent emotional turmoil.

In the Bhagavad Gita, an example of Samadhi is demonstrated when Arjuna returns to being equanimous after receiving teachings from Krishna and prepares for battle in a state of composure as mentioned below:

arjuna uvāca

naṣṭo mohah smṛtir labdhā

tvat-prasādān mayācyuta

sthito 'smi gata-sandehah

kariṣye vacanam tava

Arjuna said: My dear Kṛṣṇa, O infallible one, my illusion is now gone. I have regained my memory by Your mercy. I am now firm and free from doubt and am prepared to act according to Your instructions.

-BG 18.73

Sukadeva Goswami demonstrates Samadhi as he narrates scripture to Pariksit in an equanimous manner from Cantos 1-12 of the Srimad Bhagavatam. These stories demonstrate how Samadhi can empower individuals to transcend the chaos they experience in their lives. Through its creation of a steady mind, Samadhi also creates an environment conducive to the accomplishment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, Samadhi supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through the development of mentally healthy states, SDG 16 (Peace) through peaceful resolution of conflict, SDG 4 (Education) through increased focus and concentration in the educational process, and SDG 13 (Climate Change) through creating a steady and continued commitment to environmental conservation. Through these actions, Samadhi creates an environment that contributes to the long-term

success of the SDGs, specifically through the promotion of resilience. Govardhan Ecovillage provides Samadhi through yoga and meditation programs and maintains equanimity in eco-efforts, including organic farming on over 15+ acres and training 10,000+ farmers. As a result, Govardhan Ecovillage has supported SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through 1800+ health camps, SDG 16 (Peace) through community harmony, SDG 4 (Education) through training 4500+ youth, and SDG 13 (Climate Change) through the implementation of waste-to-energy conversions.

Atma Jnana (Self-Knowledge)

The Vedic principle of Atma Jnana emphasizes the realization of the true nature of the self as eternal and divine and separate from the body and mind, as is explained in the *Chandogya Upanishad* using the Mahavakya (Great Saying) “Tat Tvam Asi” (You are That), guiding the individual toward enlightenment through inquiry. Atma Jnana represents the discovery of one's own inner essence, distinguishing it from illusion, and thereby bringing about self-awareness, reducing ego-based conflict, and promoting compassionate living, because recognizing the unity of all selves leads to ethics and harmony with the world. Atma Jnana changes the way one perceives the world around us, establishing unity and purpose.

In the Brihadaranyakopanishad, Yajnavalkya explains the self to King Janaka, ultimately liberating King Janaka.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes to Arjuna the self's immortality as mentioned below:

*na jāyate mriyate vā kadācin
nāyam bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yam purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*

For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.

-BG 2.20

*vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni grhṇāti naro 'parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny
anyāni samyāti navāni dehī*

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.

-BG 2.22

The two stories represent the enlightening effects of Atma Jnana. Atma Jnana is also aligned with the SDGs through the promotion of self-aware sustainable development: SDG 4 (Education) through self-knowledge, SDG 3 (Health) through mental clarity, SDG 16 (Peace) through unity, and SDG 15 (Life on Earth) through respect for nature. The link between Atma Jnana and the SDGs is Atma Jnana's unity ethos, which supports the interconnected goals of the SDGs. Govardhan Ecovillage teaches Atma Jnana through sustainability education, discovering the self within nature, as seen in biodiversity projects with 140+ species. As a result, Govardhan Ecovillage has

fulfilled SDG 4 (Education) through educating 8700+ students, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through wellness initiatives, SDG 16 (Peace) through community building, and SDG 15 (Life on Earth) through reforestation.

Brahman (Ultimate Reality)

Brahman, as described in the *Mandukya Upanishad*, is the unchanging ultimate reality that underlies existence and supports the realization of one's connection to it for spiritual liberation. Thus, Brahman represents a holistic worldview that recognizes divinity in all things and promotes reverence for life, moral behavior, and unity among diverse peoples, resulting in reduced divisions and improved harmony in society. This can be seen in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (Chapter 3) in Bhrigu's meditation, where he realizes that Brahman is the source of bliss.

The Srimad Bhagavatam also talks about Brahman as a non-dual substance, as mentioned below:

vadanti tat tattva-vidas

tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam

brahmeti paramātmēti

bhagavān iti śabdyate

Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this nondual substance Brahman, Paramātmā or Bhagavān.

-SB 1.2.11

These principles are consistent with SDG 15 (Life on Land) through reverence for nature as sacred; SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through unity; SDG 13 (Climate Action) through holistic care of the environment; and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through interconnectivity. Through forest conservation in the Vrindavan Forest (home to over 63 bird species) and through the conservation of over 150,000 lives through community services, GEV fulfills SDG 15, SDG 16, and SDG 17, respectively, while through the use of over 300 KW of solar power, GEV also fulfills SDG 13. Additionally, through MoU agreements with IIT Kanpur, GEV will further support SDG 17 in the coming year, and through its Brahman-centered teachings, GEV will harvest over 110+ million liters of water each year, thus demonstrating the relevance of these teachings to water conservation.

Maya (Illusions)

The Vedic principle of Maya, as described in the Bhagavad Gita, defines the divine energy that veils true reality, thus creating confusion for humans, but through the encouragement of transcendence through knowledge by Krishna, humans may overcome their ego- and desire-based entrapments. Maya provides discernment of illusions such as material permanence, and through such discernment humans can make wiser decisions and live in a way that is more authentic and therefore less likely to experience suffering.

Markandeya's illusion of Vishnu is discussed in Srimad Bhagavatam as mentioned below:

śrī-bhagavān uvāca

bho bho brahmarṣi-varyo 'si

siddha ātma-samādhinā

mayi bhaktyānapāyinyā

tapah-svādhyāya-sāmyamaiḥ

The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: My dear Mārkaṇḍeya, you are indeed the best of all learned brāhmaṇas. You have perfected your life by practicing fixed meditation upon the Supreme Soul, as well as by focusing upon Me your undeviating devotional service, your austerities, your study of the Vedas and your strict adherence to regulative principles.

vayaṁ te parituṣṭāḥ sma

tvad-br̥had-vrata-caryayā

varam pratīccha bhadraṁ te

vara-do 'smi tvad-īpsitam

We are perfectly satisfied with your practice of lifelong celibacy. Please choose whatever benediction you desire, since I can grant your wish. May you enjoy all good fortune.

athāpy ambuja-patrākṣa

puṇya-śloka-sikhāmaṇe

drakṣye māyām yayā lokaiḥ

sa-pālo veda sad-bhidām

O lotus-eyed Lord, O crest jewel of renowned personalities, although I am satisfied simply by seeing You, I do wish to see Your illusory potency, by whose influence the entire world, together with its ruling demigods, considers reality to be materially variegated.

Thus, both examples illustrate the deceptiveness of Maya. Through the reduction of consumerist illusions, SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production); through education focused on seeking truth, SDG 4 (Quality Education); through taking genuine action regarding the environment, SDG 13 (Climate Action); and through providing fair perspectives, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), the principles of Maya are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At GEV, overcoming Maya is encouraged through training in organic farming techniques for 10,000+ farmers, thereby reducing waste (600+ kg of compost generated daily), SDG 12, and empowering tribal communities, SDG 10. Also, at GEV, overcoming Maya is facilitated through educational workshops focused on spirituality, sustainability, and environmentalism (SDG 4); through carbon-neutral practices (SDG 13); and through workshops focused on recognizing illusions (SDG 10).

Moksha (Liberation)

In the Upanishads, the Vedic principle of Moksha represents the ultimate liberation from the cycle of rebirth and is achieved through knowledge, devotion, or selfless action. This leads to eternal peace, moral purity, and service. Moksha orients life toward transcendence, encouraging people to find joy and contribute positively to society.

The Bhagavad Gita talks about the process of achieving moksha through yoga, as mentioned below:

sparśān kṛtvā bahir bāhyāṁś

caḅṣuś caivāntare bhruvoḥ

prāṇāpānau samau kṛtvā

nāsābhyantara-cāriṇau

yatendriya-mano-buddhir

munir mokṣa-parāyaṇaḥ

vigatecchā-bhaya-krodho

yaḥ sadā mukta eva saḥ

Shutting out all external sense objects, keeping the eyes and vision

concentrated between the two eyebrows, suspending the inward and outward

breaths within the nostrils, and thus controlling the mind, senses and

intelligence, the transcendentalist aiming at liberation becomes free from

desire, fear and anger. One who is always in this state is certainly liberated.

-BG 5.27-28

Therefore, Moksha is shown to be achievable. Moksha aligns with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through spiritual well-being; SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting freedom; SDG 4 (Quality Education) through enlightenment-focused learning; and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through collaboration. GEV pursues Moksha through yoga and Ayurveda programs that treat 88,500+ patients for SDG 3; GEV energizes 150,000+ lives for SDG 16; GEV trains 4,500+ young people for SDG 4; and GEV establishes partnerships through 2024 MoU agreements for SDG 17. GEV is running many liberation-focused integrated courses, thus further increasing its holistic impact.

Samsara (Cycle of Rebirth)

The Vedic principle of Samsara, as described in the Bhagavad Gita, describes the cycle of repeated birth, death, and rebirth driven by karma and encourages ethical behaviors to break out of the cycle through adherence to dharma. Samsara fosters responsibility and compassion for those who understand the impermanence of life and therefore seek to escape its cycle.

The cycle of Samsara is illustrated in the Mahabharata (Shanti Parva), where Bhishma explains the nature of Samsara. In the Srimad Bhagavatam (Canto 5), Bharata's multiple rebirths illustrate the cyclical nature of Samsara as mentioned below:

*tadānīm api pārśva-vartinam ātmajam ivānuśocantam abhivīkṣamāṇo mṛga
evābhiniveśita-manā visṛjya lokam imam saha mṛgeṇa kalevaram mṛtam anu
na mṛta-janmānusmṛtir itaravan mṛga-śarīram avāpa.*

At the time of death, the king saw that the deer was sitting by his side, exactly like his own son, and was lamenting his death. Actually the mind of the king was absorbed in the body of the deer, and consequently, like those bereft of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he left the world, the deer, and his material body and acquired the body of a deer. However, there was one advantage. Although he lost his human body and received the body of a deer, he did not forget the incidents of his past life.

-SB 5.8.27

The principles of Samsara are aligned with SDG 13 (Climate Action) through long-term environmental care; SDG 15 (Life on Land) through the preservation of

ecosystems; SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through holistic wellness; and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through karma-based fairness. GEV seeks to disrupt Samsara through eco-practices such as rainwater harvesting (over 110+ million liters per year) to fulfill SDG 13; through the conservation of the Vrindavan Forest to fulfill SDG 15; through health camps to fulfill SDG 3; and through tribal empowerment to fulfill SDG 10. Furthermore, GEV is regularly providing courses that focus on escaping Samsara and promote sustainable behaviors.

Purusha (Cosmic Person)

According to Purusha Sukta from the Rig Veda, Purusha represents a universal spirit that inspires the reverence for the divine within each being and promotes harmony and ethically treating others. In other words, Purusha allows one to see the divine in everyone and therefore encourages respect and equality among people. This is shown in Srimad Bhagavatam, as Purusha Avatars are manifestations of the divine presence, as mentioned below:

sūta uvāca

jagr̥he pauruṣam rūpam

bhagavān mahad-ādibhiḥ

sambhūtam ṣoḍaśa-kalam

ādau loka-sisṛkṣayā

Sūta said: In the beginning of the creation, the Lord first expanded Himself in the universal form of the puruṣa incarnation and manifested all the ingredients for the material creation. And thus at first there was the creation of the sixteen

principles of material action. This was for the purpose of creating the material universes.

-SB 1.3.1

The values at GEV are aligned with SDG 15 (Life on Land) through sacred nature conservation; SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through unity; SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by honoring divine equality between men and women; and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through respectful partnerships. In addition to Cow Protection Programs for over 100 cows that support SDG 15, Community Services for SDG 16, Women's Empowerment Programs for SDG 5, and Partnerships for SDG 17 in 2024, GEV has Biodiversity-Focused Rituals that promote reverence for the universe.

Prakriti (Material Nature)

Another concept used by GEV is Prakriti (the Material Nature), which refers to the dynamic physical energy that interacts with consciousness. Prakriti is associated with the Sankhya philosophy and is discussed in the Bhagavad Gita as mentioned below:

bhūmir āpo 'nalo vāyuh

kham mano buddhir eva ca

ahaṅkāra itīyam me

bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego – all together

these eight constitute My separated material energies.

-BG 7.4

GEV believes that humans should strive to maintain a balance with Prakriti, or the material world, by reducing our impact on the environment and taking steps to preserve ecosystems. For example, GEV has created a forest area called Vrindavan Forest on their property and is working to restore the natural habitat of plants and animals in the region. They are also planting trees to increase the amount of oxygen in the air and to act as a barrier against pollution. These efforts reflect GEV's belief in the importance of maintaining a balance with Prakriti and protecting the natural world (SDG 6, 13, 14).

Yoga (Divine Union)

Patanjali's system of yoga in the "Yoga Sutras" describes the union with the divine through yogic practices that focus on the integration of the body, mind, and spirit as mentioned in the below verse:

yogas chitta vritti nirodha

Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind.

-Patanjali Yoga Sutra 1.2

In essence, the practice of yoga allows individuals to experience holistic wellness and connect to their higher consciousness. The structure of Patanjali's system mirrors this concept in providing a framework of disciplines that correspond to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) via physical/mental well-being; SDG 4 (Quality Education) through mindfulness-based education; SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through inner peace; and SDG 13 (Climate Action) through increased

awareness of sustainability. At GEV, the annual graduate output from the yoga school supports the delivery of SDG 3 wellness programs; SDG 4 educational retreats; SDG 16 community building; and SDG 13 eco-conscious practices through weekly yoga classes enhancing holistic sustainability.

The table below maps some of the Vedic concepts with the UN SDGs.

Vedic Concept	Primary SDG Mappings
Dharma (Righteousness/Duty)	1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 16, 17
Ahimsa (Non-Violence)	2, 3, 5, 13, 14, 15, 16
Karma (Action/Consequence)	8, 9, 12, 13
Seva (Selfless Service)	1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 17
Bhakti (Devotion)	3, 4, 16, 17
Yoga (Union/Discipline)	3, 4, 13
Aparigraha (Non-Possessiveness)	1, 12, 13, 15
Asteya (Non-Stealing)	1, 8, 10, 12
Brahmacharya (Moderation)	3, 12, 13
Satya (Truth)	4, 16
Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (World as Family)	5, 10, 16, 17
Prakriti (Reverence for Nature)	6, 7, 13, 14, 15
Panchamahabhuta (Five Elements)	6, 7, 13, 14, 15
Rta (Cosmic Order)	13, 15, 16

Karma Yoga (Selfless Action)	8, 9, 12
Jnana (Knowledge/Wisdom)	4, 9, 17
Moksha (Liberation)	3, 16
Sacred Ecology/Eco-Spirituality	11, 13, 15

Table 4.1 Vedic features and respective UN SDGs

At GEV, the above Vedic principles manifest in various attitudinal and behavioral manners. The motivation behind many volunteers at GEV is spiritual. All GEV leaders report that their motivation comes from a desire to practice bhakti (devotion) and perform seva (selfless service) through the protection of 100+ cows and production of 600+ kg of organic compost on a daily basis, which supports SDG 2 (zero hunger). Because the motivation behind volunteers at GEV is based on a desire to express devotion and serve others, it will continue long after secular NGOs have lost support for their volunteer efforts, as has been the case with comparable volunteer efforts in the ecovillages at Mayapur and Vrindavan.

GEV uses community integration based on *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world as one family) to empower 1100+ tribal families living in 50+ villages. GEV trains 10,000+ farmers in organic farming methods and increases income by 40% for SDG 8 (decent work) and SDG 1 (no poverty). As an additional benefit of using this inclusive approach to community development, GEV provides equitable access to resources.

GEV also employs ethical leadership through a council style of governance that includes empowering women through 20+ self-help groups to support SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice). Through its leadership program, GEV trains 4500+ youth in skills related to SDG 8.

As indicated by the collected data, participants utilized Vedic-inspired approaches to create resiliency in their communities. Examples of Vedic-inspired approaches include the distribution of 1.5 lakh saplings and planting of 5,000 trees/15,000 shrubs at GEV. Such approaches contribute to the ability of Vedic faith-based organizations such as GEV to attract lakhs of visitors each year for ecotourism training.

4.3 Research Question Three

What are the key thematic dimensions that are involved in terms of UN SDGs?

Thematic analysis was used to assess the qualitative information gathered through a grounded theory approach as described by Strauss & Corbin (1994) on the information obtained from the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and additional documentation (for example, GEV Annual Reports, project evaluations, and Vedic literature).

The iterative process of coding led to the emergence of 5 primary thematic components of ecological harmony, community resilience, ethical governance, spiritual prosperity, and partnership building. These thematic dimensions are an integral part of the Vedic principles, for example, Prakriti (respect for nature), Seva (selfless service), Dharma (the right way to live), Bhakti (love/devotion), and

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family) and therefore can be integrated into the 5 P's (People/Equity, Planet/Sustainability, Prosperity/Economic Wellbeing, Peace/Justice and Harmony, and Partnership/Collaboration) framework of the UN SDGs.

In addition to outlining the operational frameworks of Vedic-based FBOs, the dimensions illustrate how Vedic sustainability is able to promote all 17 SDGs through interdependent and holistic practice. In addition, cross-linkages between the dimensions ensure full coverage of the SDGs. As an example, one single initiative, such as organic farming at GEV, illustrates how a single initiative can link to multiple dimensions and SDGs, highlighting the synergy of Vedic sustainability.

The results from the other Vedic ecovillages, such as ecovillages in Mayapur and Vrindavan, demonstrated consistent findings, indicating that these thematic dimensions are not specific to GEV but rather common patterns of Vedic FBOs. This validation across different sites of study enhances the applicability of the findings to other contexts, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and suggests that Vedic models can be scalable internationally.

Ecological Harmony

This thematic component emerged as the most commonly referenced theme and demonstrates the Vedic principle of *Prakriti* (nature as sacred and interconnected with the divine) that requires a sense of stewardship towards the environment as an act of devotion. This thematic component is directly related to the "Planet" pillar of the SDGs that emphasizes the need to protect the planet from degradation through

sustainable use of resources. Ecological harmony is practiced at GEV through biodiversity and conservation efforts, including the Vrindavan Forest project, which has hosted more than 64 species of butterflies, 63 species of birds, and 140+ species of plants, creating an ecosystem that supports pollinators and soil health. Through rainwater harvesting systems, GEV has saved over 110 million liters of water each year and has mitigated drought in surrounding tribal lands while replenishing groundwater. These practices relate primarily to SDGs 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life Below Water), and 15 (Life on Land) by utilizing natural sequestration (e.g., planting 5,000+ trees and 15,000+ shrubs) to reduce carbon footprints and protecting aquatic ecosystems through clean water runoff.

These practices also demonstrate cross-linkages to other SDGs, such as the biodiversity efforts indirectly supporting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) by enhancing agricultural yields through natural pest control and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) through improved water quality. Data from GEV leaders noted that this thematic component is based on references from Vedic texts, such as the *Atharva Veda*, which invokes hymns for environmental balance, leading to a "default alignment" among adherents that environmental damage is *adharmic* (unrighteous). Additionally, comparative research from other ecovillages indicated similar initiatives, such as the preservation of sacred groves, demonstrating ecological harmony as a universal Vedic theme that inherently promotes planetary SDGs without external motivators.

Community Resilience:

The “People” pillar focuses on human-centered development to address vulnerabilities. Community resilience is an extension of Vedic ideas, including *Seva* and *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Empowerment programs and crisis response mechanisms at GEV, such as food plate distributions of 2.1+ million to emergency situations, i.e., COVID-19, impacting 150,000+ lives in 50+ tribal villages, directly support SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) while creating collective strength and empowerment. The Wadi Program, a sustainable agricultural program that has provided education/training to 1100+ tribal families and generated a 40% increase in household income while increasing the ability of households to adapt to climate shocks, also demonstrates the application of community resilience.

This theme supports multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through GEV’s provision of skill development workshops for 4500+ youth, providing Vedic wellness practices to support both mental and physical resilience. Additionally, cross-linkages exist between GEV’s programs and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) due to rural-urban knowledge exchanges. Similar programs were identified in other ecovillages, such as Vrindavan and Mayapur, demonstrating how the Vedic principles of communal harmony build resiliency and support SDGs by placing a priority on marginalized populations in accordance with the “leave no one behind” ethos.

Ethical Governance

Ethical governance was identified as being a direct result of Vedic Dharma, promoting just, inclusive, and transparent leadership. Ethical governance corresponds to the

“Peace” pillar, ensuring accountability and equity within institutions. Examples of ethical governance at GEV include decision-making models based on Vedic Council Style, incorporating diverse voices such as empowering women through 20+ self-help groups and skill development programs for 4500+ youth, directly supporting SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions); and anti-corruption measures founded in Satya (Truth), to create trust in community-led projects.

The cross-linkages between GEV’s programs and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) can be seen through GEV’s inclusion of marginalized groups (castes and genders), as noted in Fici (2022), who notes some of the remaining caste issues but highlights GEV’s efforts to be inclusive. Analysis of other ecovillages demonstrated the consistency, where leaders described similar dharma-based councils to prevent conflict and promote justice, further demonstrating how Vedic ethics inherently align with SDG 16’s call for inclusive societies.

Spiritual Prosperity

Spiritual Prosperity combines the Vedic principles of Bhakti and Jnana (Wisdom) to provide a model of inner fulfillment combined with material advancement, aligning with the “Prosperity” pillar. Examples of spiritual prosperity at GEV include wellness programs using Ayurveda and yoga retreats to train thousands in holistic health (SDG 3), while GEV’s ecotourism initiatives attract lakhs of visitors annually, creating jobs and supporting SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). GEV’s approach to spiritual prosperity draws from the Bhagavad Gita’s Karma Yoga, promoting purposeful work for collective prosperity.

GEV's approaches to spiritual prosperity have cross-linkages to SDG 4 (Quality Education) through their spiritual teachings enhancing innovation. Responses from other ecovillages demonstrated the same, reporting bhakti-driven economic models, demonstrating how Vedic spirituality naturally promotes prosperity without exploitation while supporting all SDGs through balanced growth.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Partnerships & Collaboration were identified in the data collected and embody the Vedic principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, promoting global unity and cooperation, directly aligning with the "Partnership" pillar (SDG 17). At GEV, partnerships & collaboration are seen through 2024 Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with institutions such as IIT Kanpur for Green Technology and IGBC for Sustainable Buildings and UN Accreditations (UNEP, UNCCD) that amplify the impact of GEV's programs. These MoUs and accreditations facilitate knowledge sharing and resource mobilization.

The cross-linkages of GEV's programs with all SDGs can be seen through its collaborations with NGOs for water projects (SDG 6). Comparable ecovillages demonstrated a similar network of partnerships, indicating how Vedic interconnectedness defaults to partnerships, enabling GEV to scale up its impact on SDGs.

Together, these dimensions demonstrate that GEV has the capacity to meet all 17 SDGs organically through its holistic coverage, as evidenced across comparable ecovillages. This validation of the transformative role of Vedic FBOs in sustainable

development supports the integration of Vedic philosophy into the implementation of SDGs.

4.4 Research Question Four

How do these thematic dimensions translate into actions of successful implementation of UN SDGs?

These thematic dimensions, i.e., ecological harmony, community resilience, ethical governance, spiritual prosperity, and partnership building, are translated into tangible implementations of the UN SDGs using a structured and Vedic-inspired process that will produce both holistic and sustainable results. The grounded theory of qualitative data (interviews, questionnaires, and documents) provides a basis for identifying how this process works in four sequential and iterative phases: (1) inspirational phase based upon the Vedic scriptures and concepts such as Karma Yoga (the selfless act) and Dharma (the right action/ethics), which provide the philosophical basis for aligning actions with Universal Harmony; (2) planning phase in which the community councils or Vedic-style councils collect inputs from various stakeholders to reflect Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (world as one family) in order to achieve inclusive participation; (3) implementation phase in which community-driven, hands-on projects embody Seva (the selfless service) and practical application of Vedic knowledge; and (4) monitoring phase in which holistic measurements are used to assess the success of the projects and consist of a combination of quantitative measures (e.g., number of beneficiaries, environmental audits) and qualitative measures (e.g., surveys assessing spiritual well-being); the latter is inspired by Vedic introspection practices such as Atma Vichara (the self-reflection). As a result of the

continuous cycle of the four phases of the process of GEV and other similar Vedic ecovillages are able to transform their dimensions into concrete projects and overcome the difficulties associated with resource shortages through the contribution of devotion and creative adaptations.

GEV has been able to demonstrate successful implementations of all 17 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while cross-dimensionally synergistic effects have been demonstrated to amplify the impact of individual projects. For example, a single project such as the Wadi Program is capable of promoting both community resilience and ecological harmony, thereby impacting multiple SDGs at the same time. GEV questionnaire responses from the leaders have confirmed the effectiveness of the process and further indicated improved SDG outcomes due to the holistic nature of the process.

Ecological Harmony to Action

Ecological harmony, as it is described in the Vedic tradition as reverence for Prakriti (divine nature), can be translated into actions that promote the conservation of the environment and align with the "Planet" pillar. The process begins with inspiration from texts such as the *Atharva Veda*, which describes nature as being sacred, and leads to community-led planning that incorporates the needs of local biodiversity. Practical implementation of ecological harmony includes projects such as organic farming across 15+ acres, an agricultural research farm, and waste management systems that convert organic, cow dung, and agricultural waste into compost. By providing zero-waste cycles, natural fertilizers reduce emissions to combat climate change (SDG 13), protect aquatic ecosystems (SDG 14), and foster biodiversity in the

Vrindavan Forest (home to 63+ bird species, 64+ butterfly species, and 140+ plant species) to promote life on land (SDG 15). Efforts are being made to achieve carbon neutrality, 1300+ farmers adopted organic farming methods, and 10,000+ people received training to enhance soil health and reduce dependence on chemicals.

Devotional contributions from volunteers and innovative experiments in vermicomposting helped resolve the initial challenges to restoring degraded soils in GEV's 2024 research projects.

Community Resilience to Action

Community resilience, inspired by the Vedic concepts of Seva (selfless service) and Sahana (collective endurance), can be translated into actions that improve the capacity of vulnerable populations to withstand adversity and align with the "People" pillar.

Planning for community resilience is inspired by the Bhagavad Gita's encouragement of selfless assistance and utilizes tribal councils to develop culturally sensitive approaches. Community programs such as the Wadi Program empowered 1,100+ tribal families in 50+ villages through sustainable agriculture and water development initiatives that harvested 110+ million liters of water through 3 ponds and 5 open wells for irrigation and recharge during the COVID-19 pandemic, distributing 2.1+ million meals and building short- and long-term resilience. The actions of GEV addressed SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 6 (clean water and sanitation), and 10 (reduced inequalities) by empowering marginalized tribes and enhancing the overall quality of life for 150,000+ people since 2010 and improving drought resistance in surrounding areas. Funding challenges were resolved by bhakti-motivated donations and partnerships. Similar actions have been implemented in Vrindavan and Mayapur ecovillages (e.g.,

community kitchens), confirming the role of community resilience in developing SDG-aligned communities.

Ethical Governance to Action

The action of ethical governance based on the Vedas and transparent leadership translates to the “Peace” pillar decision-making processes with a focus on justice and the use of Mahabharata’s Councils of Ethics to guide planning through inclusive and participatory forums to ensure equitable decision-making processes. The implementation of this will be achieved through the use of inclusive decision-making processes that lead to green building projects; one example of this is the construction of approximately 300,000 square feet of mud block structures utilizing 400,000+ (4 Lac+) CSEBs (Compressed Stabilized Earth Blocks) to provide environmentally friendly building options. The construction of these buildings has provided a reduction in carbon emissions and provides sustainable materials. Therefore, it has been awarded an IGBC Platinum rating and a GRIHA 5-star rating, therefore achieving SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through the creation of eco-friendly housing options.

This has created outcomes such as the development of resilient infrastructure that supports community programs, with cross-links to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) through innovative uses of materials. Overcoming challenges related to regulations required the use of devotional advocacy and expert consultation, as demonstrated by GEV's 2024 MOU with IIT Kanpur for green technology. Other ecovillages also revealed dharma-based governance in order to achieve similar

awards. demonstrating the impact of dharma-based governance in achieving SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Spiritual Prosperity to Action

Spiritual prosperity rooted in Vedic Bhakti and Jnana translates into actions that merge individual growth with economic vitality, thereby fulfilling the “Prosperity” pillar. Planning informed by the wisdom of the Upanishads will create holistic programs. The implementation of these plans will consist of two main initiatives: educational programs that train 4500+ youth in sustainability and Vedic wellness, and ecotourism that attracts lakhs of visitors per year for experiential learning opportunities. Both of these initiatives create economic opportunity and promote Ayurvedic medicine and yoga. In doing so, they are contributing to the achievement of multiple SDGs, including SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) through wellness retreats, SDG 4 (Quality Education) through 70+ college visits and 45+ internship experiences, SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through job creation, and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) through research farms.

These initiatives have created empowered communities and have garnered recognition through awards such as UNWTO for decarbonizing tourism. Additionally, other ecovillages have also successfully translated their spirituality into the implementation of similar types of programs (e.g., spiritual retreats), providing evidence of the success of Vedic-driven prosperity.

Partnership Building to Action

Partner building embodies Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and represents collaborative networks to scale the impact of projects and contributes to the fulfillment of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The inspiration for Vedic unity principles will guide strategic planning with stakeholders. The implementation of these plans will be accomplished through the establishment of 2024 MOUs with IIT Kanpur and IGBC for green building advancements and the inclusion of GEV in the UN Biodiversity Report 2024 to expand the scope of GEV's work globally. Collaborations with GEV will also occur at the academic level, through partnerships such as WeSchool for leadership programs, and will foster cross-SDG synergies.

GEV's successes in developing partnerships have resulted in increased project scalability, and the challenges of coordinating efforts were overcome through the shared values of Vedic principles. Data collected from comparable studies of other ecovillages indicates engaging in similar types of networks, indicating the importance of partnerships in the overall achievement of SDGs.

Overall, GEV has had success across all these dimensions of SDG implementation through its numerous awards (UNWTO, GRIHA 5-star, IGBC Platinum) and through metrics such as 150,000+ lives transformed, 110+ million liters of water saved, and carbon neutrality. Overall, this Vedic approach creates a resilient and effective method for SDG implementation through the contribution of volunteers and has allowed GEV to become a replicable model for successful implementation of SDGs.

4.5 Research Question Five

How to measure the impact of these sustainable practices in terms of actionable projects?

The Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV) uses a hybrid framework to assess the performance of its sustainable practices that utilizes both qualitative and quantitative measures and Vedic-based holistic evaluations. The framework is designed to support both the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Vedic principles, which allow for a total assessment of the social, ecological, and spiritual results from the projects. The hybrid framework was developed using Value-Focused Thinking (Keeney, 1992) and applies to the tracking of all the projects initiated at GEV. The hybrid framework is composed of three distinct categories of evaluation:

1. Quantitative Measures

The quantitative measures of the hybrid framework include collecting numerical data about the outcomes of each of the sustainable practice projects. This data collection is performed through various means, including surveys of beneficiaries, environmental audits, and data collection from monitoring systems. The data collected through these means is used to demonstrate the level of success achieved by each of the projects relative to the specific SDG targets.

For example, the data collected through beneficiary surveys is used to demonstrate that the Wadi Program and other rural empowerment initiatives have provided economic benefits to rural individuals who reside in 50+ villages. This demonstrates the success of the initiative under SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality). Similarly, the data collected from environmental audits provides evidence

of the significant reductions in water consumption that have resulted from the implementation of the water conservation program. This provides evidence of the success of the program under SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Furthermore, the data collected from energy production logs provides evidence of the success of the solar power program in reducing reliance upon non-renewable energy sources and achieving carbon neutrality by the year 2027. The reduction in reliance upon non-renewable energy sources is a direct result of the expansion of the solar power system to 300 KW and results in a contribution toward SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

2. Qualitative Assessments

In addition to collecting numerical data regarding the outcome of the sustainable practice projects, the hybrid framework also collects data through qualitative assessments. These assessments utilize narrative information, such as stories of stakeholders and thematic mapping, to provide context for how the outcomes of the sustainable practice projects reflect the Vedic values of Bhakti (devotion) and Seva (selfless service). The narrative information gathered through qualitative assessments allows for a better understanding of how the sustainable practice projects relate to the Vedic values of Bhakti and Seva.

As an example, the narratives of the participants in the crisis response programs provide insight into the positive emotional experiences of the participants as they receive assistance. The stories of the participants demonstrate how the crisis response programs contribute to the fulfillment of the participants' sense of devotion and

selfless service, thus illustrating how the sustainable practice projects reflect the Vedic value of Bhakti.

Similarly, the thematic mapping of the Wadi Program demonstrates how the program reflects the Vedic value of Seva. The thematic maps illustrate how the Wadi Program promotes the selfless service of the tribal people through the empowerment of the tribal people and the promotion of sustainable agriculture practices.

3. Vedic-Based Holistic Indicators

In addition to collecting numerical data regarding the outcome of the sustainable practice projects and collecting narrative data to provide context for how the outcomes of the sustainable practice projects reflect the Vedic values of Bhakti and Seva, the hybrid framework also collects data through the use of Vedic-based holistic indicators. These indicators evaluate the intangible qualities of the outcomes of the sustainable practice projects.

One example of Vedic-based holistic indicators is the use of Bhakti metrics to assess the quality of the relationship between the participants of the sustainable practice projects and the projects themselves. For example, the assessment of participant feedback after participating in the sustainable practice projects may be used to determine the degree of spiritual fulfillment experienced by the participants, which is one of the Bhakti metrics.

Another example of Vedic-based holistic indicators is the use of Dharma (ethics) to assess the quality of the relationship between the participants of the sustainable

practice projects and the projects themselves. For example, the use of Dharma as an indicator may involve assessing whether the relationships between the participants of the sustainable practice projects and the projects themselves are characterized by ethical behavior.

Questionnaires were completed by leaders at the GEV and by other ecovillages that followed the same Vedic model. Results showed that this hybrid framework was highly effective. They attributed this high effectiveness to the fact that it combined empirical rigor with cultural relevance.

The hybrid framework is applied to all of the GEV's actionable projects. It is used to provide iterative improvement to the projects and to ensure that they are aligned with all 17 of the SDGs. Examples of how the framework is applied to some of the GEV's projects include:

Annual Reports: Annual reports of the GEV are prepared to report on the progress of the organization toward meeting the SDGs. The reports are prepared based on the data that is collected during the course of the year from surveys of beneficiaries, environmental audits, and data collection from monitoring systems.

Digital Tools: Digital tools are utilized by the GEV to report on the progress of the organization toward meeting the SDGs. The digital tools collect data from surveys of beneficiaries, environmental audits, and data collection from monitoring systems and present the data in a way that facilitates reporting.

Challenges: Challenges that occur when attempting to apply the hybrid framework to the GEV's projects include addressing data silos. Data silos refer to the inability to access data that is collected from different sources. One solution to this challenge is to develop digital dashboards that provide access to real-time data from multiple sources.

Comparative Data: Data indicates that the hybrid framework of the GEV is being utilized by other Vedic ecovillages that are located around the world. Examples of other Vedic ecovillages that utilize the hybrid framework include Mayapur and Vrindavan-inspired sites. Many of the Vedic ecovillages that utilize the hybrid framework utilize Vedic introspection to gather additional qualitative data that adds depth to the assessments. The hybrid framework of the GEV is validated by international accreditation from organizations that include but are not limited to the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), the UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), the UN ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council), and the UNCBD (United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity). The international accreditations validate the global application of the hybrid framework and demonstrate the role of Vedic FBOs (Faith-Based Organizations) in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Below, the framework is further detailed in regard to the GEV's actionable projects and the updated metrics for the latest initiatives of the GEV, including enhanced water efficiency and continuing solar power expansions.

Quantitative Measures

Quantitative measures represent the majority of the GEV's data collection process. The data is collected from surveys, audits, and monitoring systems to document the specific measurable results of each of the GEV's projects. The data is collected annually from each of the GEV's projects and is compared to the specific SDG targets for that particular project. For example, the survey data collected from beneficiaries of the Wadi Program and the Rural Empowerment Initiatives demonstrates the number of rural residents whose incomes have increased as a result of the GEV's initiatives. The number of rural residents whose incomes have increased represents the measurable results of the Wadi Program and the Rural Empowerment Initiatives and serves as documentation of the successful completion of the projects under SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality).

Additionally, the data collected from environmental audits provides measurable evidence of the amount of water that is conserved through the GEV's water conservation efforts. For example, 110+ million liters of rainwater are stored and harvested for biodiversity conservation and to fulfill current water requirements. The water conservation efforts included the construction of ponds and open wells to harvest rainwater, which represents a measurable achievement of the water conservation program under SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Furthermore, the data collected from energy production logs demonstrates the measurable results of the GEV's solar power program. For example, the data collected from the logs indicates that the GEV's solar power system generates 1,200-1,500 kilowatt hours of electricity daily. The generation of 1,200-1,500 kilowatt hours of

electricity daily represents a measurable achievement of the solar power program under SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and represents the first step toward achieving carbon neutrality by the year 2027.

Finally, the data collected from distribution logs and participant feedback demonstrates the measurable results of the GEV's crisis response programs. For example, the data collected from the distribution logs indicates that the GEV has distributed 2.1+ million full meals to date. The distribution of 2.1+ million full meals represents a measurable achievement of the crisis response programs under SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being).

Additionally, the data collected from audits of the follow-up training sessions for farmers demonstrates the measurable results of the GEV's organic farming program. For example, the data collected from the audits indicates that over 10,000 farmers have received training in organic farming and that 90% of the farmers who received training have adopted the organic farming methods. The adoption of organic farming methods represents a measurable achievement of the organic farming program under SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

All of the metrics collected by the GEV are benchmarked against national and international standards. The metrics are benchmarked against national and international standards because they need to be comparable to the standards used to evaluate other sustainable development projects. Benchmarking against national and international standards ensures that the GEV's metrics are empirically valid.

Additionally, many of the other Vedic ecovillages that utilize the hybrid framework to

measure the impact of their projects also benchmark their metrics against national and international standards. However, the GEV's metrics are larger than those of the other Vedic ecovillages.

Qualitative Assessments

The quantitative assessments will be complemented by qualitative assessments, which will allow us to understand the various impacts of GEV's initiatives through a more subjective lens, through narrative assessments that reflect the same storytelling style as the Vedas. There are many ways one can assess this, but some of the most common include interviews with stakeholders, group discussions, thematic analysis, and the use of value-focused thinking to map the dimensions to the sustainable development goals so that the cultural and spiritual aspects of the programs are not lost.

Stakeholders' Stories & Thematic Analysis: The experiences and accounts of the program participants, including the tribal farmers who have seen improvements in their living conditions due to the Wadi Program and how they have increased their ability to resist climate-related stressors in terms of SDG 1 (poverty reduction) and SDG 2 (hunger eradication) through the application of value-focused thinking in workshops to prioritize the Vedic values (for example, "harmony") to connect them to the SDG targets, demonstrate how there is a connection between ecological balance and social justice.

Holistic Vedic Indicators: Spiritual development is assessed through the use of Bhakti Metrics in the form of participants' reflection on the quality of their health/well-being

after participating in a yoga retreat (4,500+ youth trained), and it has been linked to SDG 3 (health) and SDG 4 (education).

Biodiversity Audits: Documenting over 63 species of birds and 64 species of butterflies in the Vrindavan Forest provides the qualitative evidence necessary to support the claim that the ecosystem within the forest is healthy and thriving and thus mapped to SDG 15 (conservation of biodiversity).

The methodologies used above were deemed to be very successful, and when combined with the results of the quantitative assessments, they provide a richer understanding of the outcomes. Comparative ecovillages (such as Mayapur) utilize similar methods to collect qualitative information on the spiritual development of participants.

Overall Framework & Future Enhancements

GEV's framework combines all of the components together in its regular Sustainability Reports that provide an overview of the organization's activities and performance relative to the specific SDG Targets and uses tools (such as the Ecovillage Impact Assessment) to compare the organization's performance to that of other organizations. In addition, the report includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative information that is obtained through the audits and through the stories collected from the stakeholders and is validated by the United Nations accrediting bodies (UNEP, UNCCD, UN ECOSOC, UNCBD), which provide both external validation of the organization's reporting process and international recognition. Recommendations made by the survey respondents included utilizing digital

dashboards to visualize the organization's data in real time (for example, through the utilization of Internet of Things Sensors for the tracking of water usage and solar generation). Comparative ecovillages are also employing the same type of frameworks, and since GEV has a relationship with the UN, the credibility of GEV's reporting process is enhanced, and Vedic FBOs are positioned as leaders in measuring impact for sustainable development.

4.6 Summary of Findings

As the first phase of this research project, the qualitative study on the application of Vedic-based Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has provided a foundational understanding of how Vedic-based FBOs can be used to support achievement of the UN SDGs. This study examined the alignment of Vedic philosophy with the UN SDGs primarily at Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV) and has also referred to a few initiatives at FBOs in Mayapura and Vrindavan. The study's use of thematic analysis, supported by grounded theory and value-focused thinking, allowed for the identification of scalable models for achieving the SDGs, providing consistent examples of Vedic approaches to sustainability.

Research Question 1:

Alignment between Vedic FBOs and UN SDGs exists because there are fundamental philosophical similarities between the two frameworks. Examples of these similarities include sanatana-dharma (eternal interconnectedness) and ahimsa (non-violence), which are reflected in the 5P framework of the SDGs. At GEV, an example of the

alignment between Vedic philosophy and the SDGs includes GEV's efforts to protect biodiversity in the Vrindavan forest (which hosts over 60 species of birds and over 140 species of plants) as part of its initiative to promote Vedic reverence for nature and to support SDGs 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water), and 15 (life on land). Leaders at GEV emphasized the importance of Vedic cosmology's focus on balance as a natural basis for global goals.

Research Question 2:

Key characteristics of Vedic FBOs that contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs include *Dharma, Ahimsa, Asteya, Bhakti*, etc. Examples of these characteristics include GEV's Goshala (protecting 100+ cows) and 300 kW solar farm, which contribute to SDG 2 (zero hunger) through organic dairy products and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) through renewable energy. Data indicated a significant advantage of Vedic FBOs in generating volunteer-based sustainability activities.

Research Question 3:

Five thematic dimensions, i.e., ecological harmony, community resilience, ethical governance, spiritual prosperity, and partnership-building, that encompass Vedic contributions to the SDGs were identified. These dimensions include contributions to all 17 SDGs and have interlinkages, e.g., organic farming (over 15 acres) contributes to SDGs 2 (zero hunger), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), and 15 (life on land), and also benefits over 10,000+ trained farmers.

Research Question 4:

These thematic dimensions were shown to be translated into long-term actions through a Vedic-inspired process of inspiration, planning, implementation, and evaluation. For example, GEV's Wadi Program empowered 1,100+ families and saved several million liters of water each year; GEV's Eco-Tourism program created economic opportunities for local people. Funding challenges were addressed by GEV's reliance on devotional contributions. GEV got international recognition and awards such as UNWTO and IGBC Platinum.

Research Question 5:

A hybrid measurement approach was presented for assessing the effectiveness of Vedic-inspired sustainable development activities, using quantitative measures (e.g., 150,000+ lives impacted, 2.1+ million meals distributed), qualitative measures (e.g., stakeholder narratives), and holistic Vedic indicators (e.g., bhakti-based well-being). The use of this framework has been validated by UN accreditation (UNEP, UNCCD).

4.7 Conclusion

The findings of this study provide conclusive evidence for the hypothesis that Vedic-based organizations have a high level of alignment with UN SDGs. The findings of this study demonstrate that Vedic-based organizations can create long-term sustainable development effects through the use of a combination of spiritual motivation (bhakti), community involvement, innovative technology, and ethical leadership. GEV serves as an exemplary model for Vedic-based organizations around the world and demonstrates that Vedic-based organizations can make significant

contributions to the achievement of the UN SDGs and that they can do so in ways that are inclusive of multiple stakeholders and are environmentally sustainable.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of Results

The results of this study confirm the advantages of Vedic-based Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in fostering a sustainable future through their natural integration of spirituality with physical action, thus providing comprehensive coverage of each of the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The blending of ancient Vedic principles, including devotion (bhakti), ethical responsibility (dharma), and reverence for nature (prakriti), with modern sustainable practices demonstrates a holistic approach that surpasses the conventional secular model. At Govardhan Ecovillage (GEV), the empirical data collected exceeds the assumptions based upon publicly available information, indicating a rapid expansion of impact. GEV's land use area has increased to greater than 100 acres with the increased usage of advanced green buildings; additionally, GEV supports several biodiversity programs, including the Vrindavan Forest, which has become home to over 63 species of birds, 64 species of butterflies, and 140 species of plants. As evidence of this expansion, GEV was selected for inclusion in the 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IIT Kanpur and the Indian Green Building Council (IGBC), and GEV was featured in the United Nations Biodiversity Report released in 2024 to highlight GEV's contribution to international conservation efforts.

The data collected confirms the primary hypothesis that there is a high degree of convergence between Vedic-based FBOs and the UN SDGs, as stated in the research proposal. The qualitative data obtained from interviews, questionnaires and

documents further illustrate how the various GEV initiatives, ranging from conserving over 110 million liters of water per year to delivering over 2.1 million meals to people in need, have positively impacted the lives of over 150,000 rural residents. A comparative analysis of data from other Vedic ecovillages, including those located in Mayapur and Vrindavan, indicates similar patterns. This positive trend represents the adaptive capacity of Vedic FBOs, due to their intrinsic motivation to provide selfless service (seva), thereby creating long-term commitments and innovative solutions to issues facing humanity. Overall, the results of this study place Vedic FBOs at the forefront of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as they offer a paradigm that incorporates spiritual elements to overcome the shortcomings of the materialistic development models, such as short-term thinking and lack of community support, that are typical of secular NGOs.

Discussion of Research Question One:

The alignment between Vedic-based FBOs and the UN SDGs stems primarily from Vedic holism, which views all existence as a single integrated entity (sanatana-dharma) that unifies human, environmental, and spiritual aspects in a way that parallels the 5 Ps (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership) of the SDGs' framework. Additionally, the philosophical convergence described above fills a gap in the existing body of literature on FBOs, which has largely been limited to non-Vedic traditions, such as Christian organizations like ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), in Raney and Raveloharimisy (2016), or Islamic and Jewish contexts, as noted in Chowdhury et al. (2019). In contrast, Vedic philosophy emphasizes a non-dualistic unity (advaita), where actions that benefit the individual will necessarily benefit the collective and the environment, thereby

addressing a major deficiency in the academic study of the contributions of Eastern faith traditions to sustainable development.

At GEV, the harmony between Vedic-based FBOs and the UN SDGs is exemplified through biodiversity initiatives, such as the Vrindavan Forest and Native Species Nursery, which act as mediators of the tension between economic development and ecological preservation. Through planting over 5,000 trees and 15,000 shrubs, GEV simultaneously fights climate change (SDG 13) while enhancing community resilience (SDG 11), thus demonstrating how Vedic reverence for nature can resolve the dichotomy often inherent in Western development models. Policy implications arising from these findings suggest that integrating Vedic holism into national frameworks, such as India's Sustainable Development Goals agenda, would likely accelerate progress, for example, through the promotion of eco-spiritual education to create intergenerational equity. Data from comparative analyses of other ecovillages reinforces this finding, thus providing a template for global policymakers to utilize faith-based approaches to bridge the development-ecology gap.

Discussion of Research Question 2

The features of Vedic-based FBOs, such as spiritual motivation, community integration, use of innovative technologies, and ethical leadership, and adherence to the principles like *dharma*, *ahimsa*, *satya*, *daan*, *svadhyay*, etc., have contributed to their ability to achieve long-term depth in SDG implementation and differentiate them from secular NGOs, which experience difficulties associated with burnout of volunteers and short-term funding cycles. The spiritual motivation derived from bhakti and karma yoga provide an intrinsic motivation to act sustainably, as

exemplified in GEV's volunteer base of 100+ people working towards long-term projects such as cow protection in the goshala and research into organic farming. In contrast, secular models rely on external motivators, which contribute to a lack of sustained commitment.

GEV's innovations in areas of sustainable energy conversion technology, such as waste-to-energy pyrolysis systems that convert plastic waste into fuel and compost production, provide replicable examples of SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) achievements with results including achieving carbon neutrality soon. Comparison data collected from questionnaire respondents at ecovillages located in Mayapur and Vrindavan indicate that Vedic-based FBOs were significantly stronger than secular organizations in terms of community involvement, with respondents indicating increased participation rates due to the use of spiritual incentives. As a result of GEV's 2024 collaborative efforts, including the LiFE Conference on Bharatiya Perspective on Sustainability, there are opportunities to scale up Vedic approaches and increase awareness through rural development policies. Overall, the above discussion demonstrates that Vedic FBOs can be considered as a new paradigm for sustainability through faith-driven innovation and can provide global development actors with lessons learned.

Discussion of Research Question 3

The five thematic dimensions of Vedic ecology (ecological harmony, community resilience, ethical governance, spiritual prosperity, and partnership building) expand upon the UN SDGs' 5P framework and add spiritual depth to address voids in the

literature where sustainability is typically addressed in a materialistic manner. The inclusion of inner fulfillment and ethical interconnectedness in the 5P framework adds a more comprehensive and integrated model for global development.

Cross-linkages between the dimensions at GEV demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach to sustainability; for example, organic farming links "people" (empowered 1,100+ tribal families through SDG 2) with "planet" (reduced emissions through SDG 13 and enhanced biodiversity through SDG 15), as shown by the 2024 UN Biodiversity Report award. Comparative insights from other ecovillages demonstrate a Vedic paradigm that addresses gaps in Western-centric studies by emphasizing harmony over hierarchy. Therefore, policy implications may include developing frameworks such as India's National Biodiversity Strategy to incorporate Vedic themes for more culturally relevant SDG progress, demonstrating the dimensions' function to bridge theoretical voids with practical application.

Discussion of Research Question 4

The translation of thematic dimensions into SDG actions using Vedic processes, inspiration from scripture, community planning, hands-on implementation, and holistic monitoring is critical to ensuring both sustainability and resilience, particularly in crisis responses, as noted in broader FBO literature that advocated for integrating faith organically into development (Tomalin et al., 2019). At GEV, this process has been successful in scaling initiatives, as demonstrated by the Wadi Program's response to droughts and pandemics, delivering 2.1+ million meals while maintaining ecological balance.

Scalability challenges, such as those experienced when expanding from 50 acres to 100+, have been reduced by establishing partnerships, such as the 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IIT Kanpur for green technologies, to foster SDG 17 synergies. Comparative ecovillages report similar Vedic-driven translations of dimensions into SDG actions. The above discussion highlights the ways in which Vedic processes can provide a resilient alternative to rigid secular models of crisis response and sustainable scaling.

Discussion of Research Question 5

Measuring frameworks used at GEV and similar Vedic FBOs integrate quantitative measures with Vedic ethics to improve the validity of the measurements by including spiritual dimensions that are often excluded from traditional SDG assessments. The hybrid measurement approach, quantitative audits, qualitative narratives, and bhakti-inspired indicators addressed limitations in measuring the spiritual impacts of sustainability, identified in Mutie (2019), and measured both the outputs (for example, 110+ million liters of water conserved) and the internal changes that resulted.

Recommendations for improving the measurement frameworks include using artificial intelligence (AI)-driven tools to track sustainability performance in real time (for example, digital dashboards to monitor solar output (300 kW) or biodiversity (63+ bird species)) to fill gaps in data collection and enhance predictive analytics for SDGs 13 and 15. Comparative data shows that many ecovillages adopt similar hybrids, and GEV's United Nations (UN) accreditation (UNEP, UNCCD) establishes a benchmark. This places Vedic frameworks as emerging solutions for holistic SDG measurement and encourages further research to explore AI-Vedic integration for global relevance.

5.2 Summary

The findings of this research are relevant to both practice and academia. As an example of the academic relevance of the findings of this research, it adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) by adding a Vedic perspective, filling a gap in the existing literature, which has largely been based on Western (Christian, Islamic, etc.) or non-Vedic traditions (Chowdhury et al. 2019; Raney & Raveloharimisy 2016). This study provides a new lens for examining how faith-driven holism may inform sustainability studies

For example, the five thematic dimensions (ecological harmony, community resilience, ethical governance, spiritual prosperity, and partnership building) identified through thematic analysis represent a novel framework for understanding how FBOs may achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and also illustrate the interlinkages between goals. For example, GEV's organic farming program (15+ acres) addresses SDGs 2, 12, 13, and 15 while training 10,000+ farmers, whereas comparative ecovillages reported analogous themes, indicating their universal applicability.

Further, the findings have several implications for practice. GEV's models of social action and community development present replicable frameworks for policymakers and practitioners working in rural India, where 65% of India's population lives. As such, the models of community organization and social mobilization presented in this

research could be used to develop programs to address poverty and water scarcity, among many other issues facing rural India.

Examples of these models are GEV's Wadi Program and its water conservation project, which together saved 110+ million liters of water annually (addressing SDGs 1 and 6) and provided income opportunities to 1,100+ tribal families, thereby supporting SDG 1 (No Poverty).

Similarly, GEV's Eco-Tourism initiative has supported SDGs 4 and 8 and has received recognition through awards such as UNWTO and IGBC Platinum. Further, GEV's unique approach to fundraising through devotional contributions to the organization provides an example of how FBOs may overcome funding constraints to support large-scale projects.

Finally, the findings of this research have implications for the role of Vedic-based FBOs in sustainable development, providing evidence of their ability to scale up their impact to support the achievement of all 17 SDGs. Therefore, the findings of this research suggest that Vedic-based FBOs may serve as a model for sustainable development globally.

5.3 Implications

These findings will be useful for policymakers and practitioners who are looking to use religious organizations as agents of change in their work in developing countries.

Academically:

In terms of future research directions, there are several possible avenues that researchers could explore based on the findings of this research. First, because Vedic-based FBOs represent a growing trend in international development, researchers could examine the specific ways in which Vedic philosophy informs the organizational mission and practices of Vedic-based FBOs, as well as the degree to which these organizations' mission and practices reflect Vedic values and principles.

Second, researchers could investigate the relative effectiveness of Vedic-based FBOs compared to secular or other types of FBOs in achieving the SDGs, especially in rural areas of developing countries. This would help determine whether Vedic-based FBOs are effective and scalable models for sustainable development or if additional modifications are needed before they can be widely adopted.

Third, researchers could build on the value-focused thinking approach used in this research to create decision-support tools that assist policymakers and practitioners in evaluating the appropriateness and feasibility of using Vedic-based FBOs to achieve various SDGs.

Globally:

This work encourages faith-based organizations' collaboration to develop faith by virtue of GEV's UN accrediting bodies and by virtue of GEV being mentioned in the 2024 UN Biodiversity Report. Vedic FBOs can provide a model to integrate all seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) using integrated methodologies (for example, people and planet, by way of organic farming), for programs such as the

UN's "Faith for Earth" initiative to support global initiatives. Also, GEV has established the basis for partnerships (such as GEV's Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian Institute of Technology at Kanpur) that will establish intersectoral partnerships, which is consistent with SDG 17, and encourage global entities to realize the significance of faith-based organizations as critical SDG agents.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon the findings of this study, to build upon the findings of this study, and to address the limitations of this study, the following are recommended for future research:

Longitudinal Data Collection in GEV Data Beyond 2025: Due to GEV's increasing scale (100+ acres, 150,000+ beneficiaries), longitudinal studies collecting data beyond 2025 to assess sustainability, including water conservation (110+ million liters), biodiversity (63+ bird species), etc., may assess the resiliency of GEV's operations over longer periods of time. This will help substantiate claims of long-term sustainability, particularly for SDGs 13 and 15, by employing time series data to assess the long-term effects of GEV's operations.

Comparative Multi-Site Studies of Vedic FBOs: Although this study provided comparative analyses of Mayapur and Vrindavan, comparative analyses of other Vedic ecovillages (urban vs. rural, North vs. South India, presence in different continents, etc.) may increase the generalizability of the findings of this study.

Employing mixed methodology to assess the various governance structures of Vedic

FBOs, or the ecological effects of Vedic FBOs, may contribute to the understanding of the scalability of Vedic FBOs.

Impact Measurement Using AI: The proposed use of an AI-Vedic framework to measure the spiritual impacts (for example, bhakti metrics) of GEV's operations using AI-driven digital dashboards for real-time tracking (for example, solar production, water conservation) should be explored. Such research may also address the gap in assessing holistic measures of the impacts of GEV's operations globally.

Collectively, the above recommendations seek to expand the breadth of the study and to ensure the findings of this study will lead to additional academic and practical advances in sustainable development.

5.5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Vedic-based FBOs, with GEV as a primary exemplar, have the capacity to achieve the UN SDGs through initiatives that are philosophically aligned with their principles, spiritually driven, and holistically measured. The significant positive impact of GEV, including the number of lives affected, the volume of water conserved, and the international recognition received (UNWTO, UN accreditations), demonstrates the potential of Vedic principles to create sustainable, equitable, and resilient communities. Furthermore, this study bridges the gaps in the literature regarding FBOs, provides practical models for rural development, and promotes global faith-based collaborations, and thus urges a greater incorporation of Vedic models into the 2030 Agenda. As the world faces increasing levels of climate

and social challenges, Vedic FBOs represent a timeless and spiritually rich approach to creating a harmonious future and, therefore, should be recognized as essential partners in global sustainability initiatives.

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APPENDIX A: About The Sanskrit Anushtubh Meter (Chand)

The formatting of Sanskrit verses (*shlokas*) throughout this dissertation, particularly the common practice of splitting them into four distinct lines, is primarily justified by the structure of the most prevalent and fundamental Vedic meter: the Anushtubh Chand (also called *Anuṣṭubh*). Anushtubh is the meter in which the vast majority of classical Vedic texts, including the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, are composed.

The Structure of Anushtubh: The Anushtubh meter is fundamentally based on a strict quantitative structure of 32 phonetic syllables (*aksharas*) per verse.

This entire verse, or shloka, is also both mathematically and metrically divided into 4 equal quarters (Padas), with each Pada having exactly 8 phonetic syllables.

Anushtubh Shloka = Pada 1 + Pada 2 + Pada 3 + Pada 4

As such, the total number of syllables in this entire Anushtubh shloka is $8 + 8 + 8 + 8 = 32$.

As well as being mathematically equal in terms of the number of syllables, each pada is a separate, complete, and self-contained metrical unit. It is therefore this division of the 32 syllables into 4 units of 8 syllables that creates the rhythm and structure of the verse, upon which its recitation is based.

The practice of separating the written representation of a single Anushtubh shloka into 4 separate lines, where each line represents one Pada, provides clarity and readability, as the visual separation of the 8-syllable Pada into four distinct lines clearly illustrates

the metrical structure of the verse, whereas printing the 32 syllables in continuous lines would create a density that could be difficult to read.

This also gives accurate recitation, as the four-line split serves as a visual guide for correct pausing (*yati*) during recitation, ensuring that the rhythm and metrical integrity of the *Chand* are maintained.

APPENDIX B: Data Collection Methods

The below methods were used to collect the data:

Questionnaires and checklists: Used to quickly and easily gather information from many people in a non-threatening way.

Interviews: Employed to fully understand participants' impressions and experiences or to explore their responses to questionnaires in greater depth.

Documentation review: Applied to gain an impression of how a program operates without interrupting it, through the analysis of applications, finances, memos, minutes, and other public audio & video records.

Observation: Conducted to collect accurate, real-time information about how a program actually functions, particularly its processes and interactions.

Focus groups: Utilized to explore a topic in depth through group discussion, such as reactions to experiences, common concerns, or suggestions for improvement.

Case Study of GEV: To facilitate a detailed mapping of Vedic principles and SDGs.

In order to allow emergent themes to develop, all research methodologies were employed iteratively. Every participant was assured informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation with respect to their human subject interactions. The data obtained from each methodology was triangulated at the time of analysis to increase the credibility and reliability of the results that are reported in the major part of this dissertation.

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide

The interview process started with an introduction and an overview of the study subject. The participant was thanked again for taking the time to speak with us. The participant was also told that the interview would be recorded and that they should feel comfortable sharing anything that they want to share, as long as it is within reason, because the conversation will remain completely confidential.

APPENDIX D: Questionnaire

Detailed Questionnaire for Research on Vedic-Based Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Section 1: Respondent and Organization

Respondent Demographics

Position within the organization (e.g. Spiritual Leader, Project Manager, Elder, Volunteer): _____

Number of years working with the organization:

Name and Location of the organization:

Primary Vedic Tradition(s) that guide your organization's work (e.g., Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Vedanta, Bhakti): _____

Organizational Description

In approximately 50 words, please describe your organization's mission statement and how your organization applies Vedic Principles to its day-to-day functions (e.g., community living, education, etc.).

Section 2: Alignment with SDGs Philosophically & Operationally

Please respond to the question "On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being no alignment, and 5 being strong alignment), how closely do you believe Vedic Principles

(ahimsa/non-violence, seva/selfless service, respect for prakriti/nature) correlate with the five Ps of the SDGs (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership). Please provide a short explanation of your reasoning.

Alignment Rating: _____

Alignment Rationale: _____

Which United Nations SDGs does your organization specifically focus on? (Check all applicable; keep in mind that a comprehensive Vedic FBO such as GEV would likely be addressing all 17). Identify how Vedic Philosophy can support each (e.g., SDG 13: Climate Action through earth honoring practices).

Applicable SDGs: 1: No Poverty 2: Zero Hunger 3: Good Health 4:

Quality Education 5: Gender Equality 6: Clean Water 7: Renewable Energy [

] 8: Decent Work 9: Innovation 10: Reduced Inequality 11: Sustainable Cities

12: Responsible Consumption 13: Climate Change 14: Life Underwater

15: Conservation of Land 16: Peace & Justice 17: Partnerships

Examples: _____

How do specific Vedic texts or teachings (such as the Bhagavad Gita on dharma, Upanishads on interconnectedness) help influence your organization's approach to the SDGs? Give 1-2 examples of how the philosophies of Vedic texts converge to support the SDGs (for example, 'Simple Living, High Thinking' aligning with SDG 12).

Section 3: The Core Features and Values of Your Vedic Based FBO

What are the top 3-5 key values or characteristics that make your Vedic FBO different from other organizations and allow for effective SDG implementation (e.g., community decision making, spiritual motivation of volunteers, integration of yoga and meditation for resilience)? Rank them and provide explanations for how each enables sustainability.

Ranked Characteristics: 1.

_____ (Explanation:
_____) 2.
_____ (Explanation:
_____) 3.
_____ (Explanation:
_____)

On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is rarely and 5 is always), how often does your organization integrate Vedic Practices (e.g., Kirtan to build community bonds, Cow Protection for Ethical Farming) into SDG related projects? Give an example of a project where integrating Vedic Practices resulted in improved results.

Rating: _____

Example: _____

Describe any special organizational structures (e.g. Council Governance Models Inspired by Vedic Councils, Funding through Devotional Contributions) that distinguish your organization from secular NGOs in supporting the SDGs.

Section 4: Thematic Dimensions and Translating Those Dimensions into Actionable Projects

List 2-3 thematic dimensions of your organization's work (e.g. Ecological Harmony, Community Resilience, Ethical Governance) and explain how those dimensions are realized in SDG aligned projects. For each dimension, describe a specific action plan (e.g., GEV's Wadi Program for Tribal Empowerment – SDG 1 & 2).

Dimension 1: _____(Action Plan:
_____; SDG Connection:
_____)

Dimension 2: _____(Action Plan:
_____; SDG Connection:
_____)

Dimension 3: _____(Action Plan:
_____; SDG Connection:
_____)

How do those thematic dimensions transform into disaster response (e.g. COVID-19 Response)? Give an example of how Vedic Principles could have supported all 17

SDGs indirectly during disasters (e.g., Food Distribution for SDG 2, Mental Health Support for SDG 3).

Describe a multi-SDG project (one that affects at least 5 goals) and outline the process of taking a Vedic-inspired idea to implementation (e.g. bhakti driven planning, training, monitoring). What challenges did you face, and how did you resolve them?

Section 5: Measuring Impact & Developing A Framework

What metrics or benchmarks does your organization utilize to evaluate the impact of SDGs (e.g., number of people served for SDG 1, reduction in carbon footprint for SDG 13)? On a scale of 1-5 (where 1 is ineffective and 5 is highly effective), how effective do you find these benchmarks? Suggest ways to improve them.

Metrics: _____(Effectiveness:
_____; Areas of Improvement:
_____)

How does your organization determine the degree to which spiritual/holistic impacts (e.g., increased sense of well-being among the community due to Vedic education) are occurring in addition to measurable SDG indicators? Provide an example framework/tool (e.g., utilizing Value-Focused Thinking in conjunction with beneficiary surveys).

How well does your company measure contributions to each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (direct and indirect) on a scale of 1 to 5?

And where are some of the gaps in measuring and how could a unified Vedic-SDG framework help fill those gaps?

Rating: _____

Gaps & Solutions: _____

Section 6: Future Implications and Recommendations

What lessons learned from your Vedic FBO can provide other organizations or policymakers for helping accelerate SDG achievement (e.g. scaling GEV's eco-tourism model for SDG 8 & 17)?

If collaborating with non-Vedic FBOs or secular organizations, what Vedic-inspired strategies would you recommend to build stronger partnerships (SDG 17)?

Open Feedback: Do you have any other insights about the potential role of Vedic-based FBOs in achieving the 2030 Agenda? (e.g. enhanced resiliency during times of global crises)

Thank you for your time. Your input will illustrate how Vedic knowledge fosters the 5P's of SDG achievement.

APPENDIX E: Informed Consent Form

VEDIC BASED FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS (FBOs) AS AN AGENT OF
TRANSFORMATION FOR IMPLEMENTING THE UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (UN SDGs)

I _____, agree to be interviewed for the research, which will be conducted by Gauranga Das (aka A S K Anand), a doctorate student at the Swiss School of Business and Management, Geneva, Switzerland.

I certify that I have been told of the confidentiality of information collected for this research and the anonymity of my participation; that I have been given satisfactory answers to my inquiries concerning research procedures and other matters; and that I have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue participation in the research or activity at any time without prejudice.

I consent to taking part in one or more electronically recorded interviews or surveys for this research. I understand that such interviews and related materials will be kept completely anonymous and that the results of this study may be published in any form that may serve it best.

I agree that any information obtained from this research may be used in any way thought best for this study.

Name of Interviewee

Date