Inaugural Editorial

Rita D. Sherma¹

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The concept of the *Journal of Dharma Studies* arose from the scholarship produced by a learned society, the Dharma Academy of North America (DANAM),¹ which has been meeting annually for over fifteen years in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Over this time, nearly a thousand scholars have participated in or attended the conferences of DANAM and helped foster analytical-constructive and translational research and scholarship on various fields and sub-disciplines. These include philosophy, theologies, ethics, epistemologies, hermeneutics, semiotics, esthetics, asceticism, praxis, metaphysics, musicology, gender, classical literature, and direct responses to critical planetary challenges—all of which comprise the diverse expressions of the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist religious traditions.

Perhaps, most importantly, the DANAM School of Thought has developed, for methodological and pedagogical use, the terms “*Dharma Traditions*” and “*Dharma Studies*”—that is, the (i) singular, (ii) interrelated (inter-Dharma), and (iii) dialogical (interreligious) academic study of the three traditions that emerged in ancient India but are, at present, global in scope and experience. Arguably, the most important rationales for the development of the term were to:

- i. Avoid the conflation of the study of the Dharma Traditions with Area Studies in order to highlight the *international* and *variegated* expressions of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain thought and practice.
- ii. Examine the shared histories, categories, significance of commonly held philosophical assumptions, epistemic methodologies, and practices, as well as two millennia of *mutual illumination* and cross fertilization, between the Dharma Traditions.

¹The scholars who helped foster the early methodological approaches associated with DANAM include, but are not limited to, DANAM’s patron, Dr. Adarsh Deepak, and Professors Rita D. Sherma, Jeffery D. Long, Ninian Smart (late), Ramdas Lamb, Ian Whicher, Arindam Chakrabarti, Graham M. Schweig, T. S. Rukmani, Kusumita Pedersen, Vesna Wallace, Anne Vallely, Rita M. Gross (late), Christopher K. Chapple, Tanya Storch, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and Purushottama Bilimoria.

✉ Rita D. Sherma
ritadsherma@aol.com

¹ The Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies, Core Doctoral Faculty, Graduate Theological Union, 2400 Ridge Road, Berkeley, CA 94709, USA

- iii. Apply the conventions of descriptive methodologies not as limitations but as starting points, in order to engage the *conceptual depth* and *intellectual applicability* of these traditions to contemporary challenges.
- iv. Give primacy to critical-constructive and reflective hermeneutical approaches and take into account the self-understanding and lived experience of these traditions.

The term Dharma Studies is known in North America and signifies not just “South Asian” religions and culture but, rather, the life-worlds of the three traditions referenced above in their diverse global expressions—whether in South Asia, the region of their emergence—or elsewhere in Asia, the West, and diaspora communities: transnationally, beyond the markers of borders, nationalities, and ethnicities. The DANAM School of Thought felt it necessary to create the term Dharma Traditions and Dharma Studies to distinguish, as well, their more extensive approaches from the normative limitations of Social Scientific Religious Studies methodologies—which conventionally do not include theology proper, pure philosophy, philosophical theology, theo-ethics, theo-praxis, constructive theological/philosophical exegesis, or their potential utilizations (translational research).

This endeavor is rooted in the effort to foster the dialog, debate, and reciprocal illumination between these *related* but *distinct* traditions that have marked their interrelated histories. The work of the DANAM school of thought led to the publication of the *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, published by Springer, to further the work initiated by the development of the field described above as Dharma Studies. From the publication experience of IJDS, we found that the journal received a surfeit of quality papers. The papers and special issues published in IJDS are available, in perpetuity, on Open Access at: <https://internationaljournaldharmastudies.springeropen.com/articles>. The *Journal of Dharma Studies* (JDS) is the new iteration of IJDS and will further the work of the original IJDS in significant ways that include provision of a forum for:

- Topics rarely covered in Social Scientific Religious Studies discourse on these traditions such as, for example, Comparative Theology/Philosophy.
- Contemporary concerns that are cross-cultural and interreligious such as Women’s Religious Leadership and Historical Contributions to the Dharma Traditions; the Physical and Natural Sciences and the Philosophies/Theologies of the Dharma Traditions; Practical Theology; Hermeneutical Criticism; Philosophy of Ritual; Applied Ethics; Sacred Texts and Contemporary Interpretations; Constructive and Liberation Theologies/Philosophies.
- Research on overlapping areas of ordinance and observance using both theoretical lenses and modes of interpretation innate to the Dharma Traditions geared towards an in-depth understanding of the specific texts, contexts, and life-worlds that form the moorings of these traditions.

The new *Journal of Dharma Studies* acknowledges and accepts the customary historical-critical textual frameworks, and descriptive methodologies for accounting for contextual lived experience and will publish articles that use such methodologies. But, its particular aims are grounded in its conception as an interdisciplinary forum for evaluating the contemporary engagements of the Dharma Traditions with the context of a new and dynamic global setting that acknowledges planetary concerns, cultural

exchange, and global flows of thought. Articles are invited in all of the areas described for publication subject to the peer-review process [<https://www.springer.com/religious+studies/journal/42240>]. Particular appreciation goes to Laura Dunn, the Editorial Manager for the Journal, for diligent primary editorial work.