

Dharma Academy of North America (DĀNAM)

**DANAM 2026 Theme: Imagination & Intention:
Thinking about the Future through Story, Philosophy & the Social/Spiritual
Reforms**

SESSION 2, Panel Title: Imagination, Intention, and the Living Earth: Dharma Traditions and the Futures of Sustainability

Organizer: Pankaj Jain

Presiding: [Christopher Chapple](#)

Panel Description

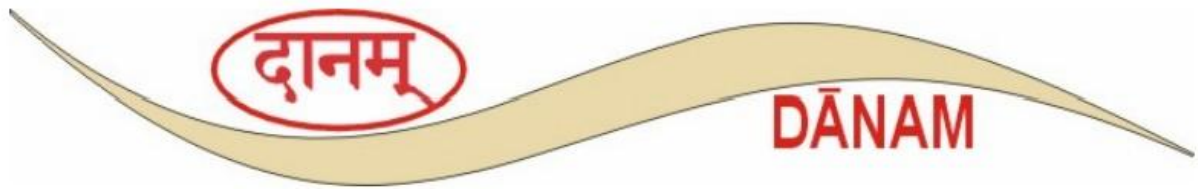
This panel examines how Dharma traditions mobilize imagination and intention to envision and enact sustainable futures. Drawing on classical texts, ethnographic case studies, and contemporary agrarian and legal discourse, the papers collectively demonstrate that Hindu and Jain intellectual and spiritual traditions offer not merely ethical guidelines but generative cosmologies — ways of imagining the human–nature relationship that carry transformative power. From the agricultural ethics of the *Krishni-Parashara* to the lived model of Govardhan Ecovillage, and from the animal narratives of the Mahabharata and Ramayana to the Jain vision of mutually sustaining life, the panel shows how Dharmic frameworks translate philosophical vision into institutional, ecological, and ethical reform. Whether through *sankalpa* and *yajña* in agrarian practice, intentional community-building in rural Maharashtra, epic allegories that cultivate attentiveness to animal vulnerability, or Jain disciplines of *ahimsā* and *aparigraha* that bind human intention within its legitimate scope, each paper treats Dharma as a living resource rather than a historical artifact. Together, the papers argue that the futures imagined through Dharma traditions are neither utopian abstractions nor nostalgic revivals, but active, intentional practices that reshape communities, landscapes, and laws today.

Paper 1

Presenter: Pankaj Jain

Title:

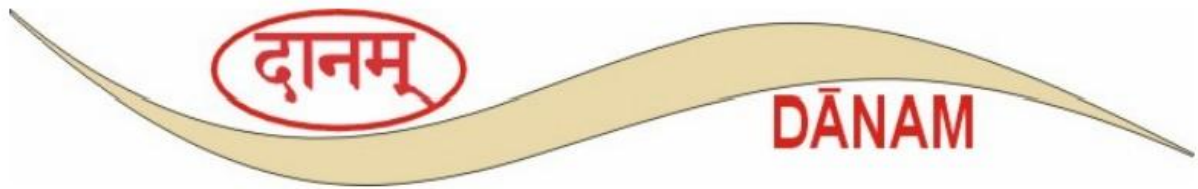
“Imagination, Intention, and Sacred Sustainability: Reimagining Dharma through Govardhan Ecovillage”



This paper explores how contemporary Dharma traditions mobilize imagination and intention to re-envision sustainable futures through Govardhan Ecovillage. Situated within Indic ecological thought, the study examines how narrative, philosophy, and embodied practice converge to produce what the paper terms "sacred sustainability." Drawing on the Bhagavad Gita, the Bhagavata Purana, and ethnographic fieldwork, the paper argues that Dharma traditions offer imaginative cosmologies that reshape human–nature relationships. Focusing on Govardhan Ecovillage as an "anticipatory community," the paper demonstrates how intentional practices — organic agriculture, water conservation, rural education, and community governance — translate philosophical ideals into actionable ecological and social reform. These initiatives have impacted over 150,000 lives across rural Maharashtra while fostering ecological resilience and social empowerment. Engaging with environmental humanities, anthropology, and religious studies, the paper situates Dharmic ecovillages within global sustainability discourse and argues that the future envisioned through Dharma is a lived, intentional reality that integrates spiritual insight with social innovation.

Bio: Pankaj Jain is Professor and Head of the Department of Humanities & Languages and Director of The India Center at FLAME University, Pune. His research spans the intersections of Dharma traditions, ecology, and sustainability, with related interests in Jain studies, diaspora studies, and Indian cinema. He is the author of the award-winning *Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability* (2011), winner of the 2012 DANAM Book Award and the 2011 Uberoi Foundation Award, as well as *Science and Socio-Religious Revolution in India* (2015), *Dharma in America: A Short History of Hindu-Jain Diaspora* (2019), *Modern Jainism: A Historical Approach* (2023), and *Jainism: From Bhagwan Mahavira to Mahatma Gandhi* (2025). He coedited the *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions* (2022). A Fulbright-Nehru Fellow, he previously served as an Associate Professor at the University of North Texas. His current work examines sacred sustainability, agrarian ethics, and ecovillage movements in contemporary India.

Keywords: *Dharma; sacred sustainability; Govardhan Ecovillage; bhakti; environmental ethics; Bhagavad Gita; Bhagavata Purana; rural development*



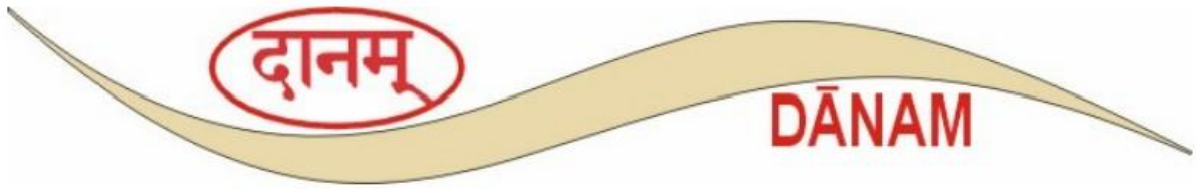
Presenter: Veena Howard

Title: “Reimagining Sacred Animal Narratives: Can they Serve as Inspiration for Policies for Animal Care?”

This paper argues that the animal narratives in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist texts, which have escaped close attention from readers, offer a significant resource for thinking about animal ethics within Dharma traditions. Although the Hindu epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, are often read as narratives centered on heroic virtues such as purity, patience, truthfulness, and nonviolence, their portrayals of nonhuman animals, advocating for their needs and moral value, have not received adequate scholarly attention. Drawing on my earlier work in animal ethics, I examine select narratives that highlight human responsibility toward animals and raise questions central to contemporary ethical debate. Although these stories can be dismissed as mere myths, I analyze them as ethical allegories that hold the potential to cultivate attentiveness to animal vulnerability and to offer normative guidance for human conduct. Furthermore, this paper situates the advocacy for animal care vis-à-vis Jain and Gandhian articulations of ahimsa, as well as existing anti-cruelty laws in India. By bringing epic literature, Dharma ethics, and legal discourse into a more holistic frame, this paper shows how sacred narratives can deepen contemporary discussions of animal suffering and contribute to the strategic development of more humane laws, industry standards, and public policy.

Veena R. Howard, Ph.D., is Professor of Asian Religious Traditions in the Department of Philosophy at California State University, Fresno. She is a recipient of the Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship (2024-2025) and Fresno State’s Provost Award in Distinguished Achievement in Research (2025-2026). She also holds the Endowed Chair in Jain and Hindu Dharma and serves as the director of the M.K. Gandhi Center: Inner Peace and Sarvodaya. Her publications include the books, *Gandhi’s Global Legacy: Moral Methods and Moral Challenges* (2023); *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Philosophy and Gender* (ed.), (2019); *Dharma, Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh Traditions of India* (ed.) (2017); and *Gandhi’s Ascetic Activism: Renunciation and Social Action* (SUNY Press, 2013). She has also authored over three dozen peer-reviewed articles, including “The Nonviolence Conundrum: Political Peace and Personal Karma in Jain and Hindu Traditions” (*Religions*, 2023). She is a frequent keynote speaker and a TEDx speaker:

https://www.ted.com/talks/veena_howard_truth_force_love_force.



Paper 3

Presenter: Raja Rosenhagen

Title: *"Bounded Intention and the Living Earth: Jain Ahimsā, Aparigraha, and Parasparopagraho Jīvānām"*

In this paper, I examine Jain thought as a Dharmic framework for imagining sustainable futures through bounded intention. *Anekāntavāda* ("non-one-sidedness"), *ahimsā* ("non-violence"), and *aparigraha* ("non-possessiveness"), I argue, converge in the Jain aphorism *parasparopagraho jīvānām*: living beings are mutually sustaining. Interpreted through Jain doctrines of standpoint and conditional assertion, this aphorism is not merely an ethical slogan. Instead, it can be read as expressing a vision of life in which beings exist through relations of mutual support, and action becomes sustainable when it respects the limits that sustain those relations. I develop this claim by treating ecological harm as a failure of scope: violence begins when human intention exceeds its legitimate range, reducing land, water, animals, plants, or future beings to instruments of a single human purpose. Jain thought counters this reduction by training ecological imagination through *naya* (standpoint discipline) and *syāt* (conditional assertion). Sustainable futures, on this view, require not only restraint in consumption but disciplined imagination: ways of intending that allow other forms of life to unfold.

Bio: Raja Rosenhagen is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Fresno, where he also serves as Coordinator of the Peace and Conflict Studies (Non-Violence) Program. He was the inaugural Bhagawan Vasu Pujya Swami Post-Doctoral Fellow in Jain Studies at the University of Pittsburgh in 2023–24. His research focuses on Jain philosophy, logic, peace and nonviolence, and comparative philosophy, with particular attention to *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, *syādvāda*, *ahimsā*, and *aparigraha*. He is currently completing a monograph, *Thinking with the Jains: An Introduction to Jain Philosophy*. Before joining Fresno State, he served as Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Ashoka University in India. He has taught Jain philosophy at both Pittsburgh and Fresno and lectures widely on Jain perspectivalism, intellectual nonviolence, and the philosophical significance of non-one-sidedness.