



Revitalizing dharma and prema as the foundation of a Hindu curriculum of love in confronting the finitude of life

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ABSTRACT

Background: Human life is essentially finite, requiring a philosophical and ethical foundation that can guide humans in facing limitations with meaning and balance. Dharma as the principle of universal truth and Prema as transcendent love are the core of Hindu teachings that can be revitalized as the foundation of a love-based curriculum. This study aims to formulate a conceptual model of a Dharma and Prema-based curriculum that is relevant in facing the finite reality of life. **Methods:** Using a qualitative approach based on critical literature review, this study examines Hindu sacred texts, educational philosophy literature, and contemporary spirituality theories to construct an integrative theoretical framework. **Findings:** The findings show that Dharma and Prema, when constructed in a love-based curriculum, are capable of fostering ethical awareness, emotional balance, and strengthening individual spirituality in facing suffering, loss, and the transience of life. This model differs from conventional moral curricula because it integrates the transcendental dimensions of Hinduism with modern educational practices, thereby contributing new insights to the development of a love-based spiritual curriculum. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, the revitalization of Dharma and Prema as a Hindu love curriculum offers an innovative perspective for facing the limitations of life with full awareness, meaning, and inner peace. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The originality of this article lies in the development of the concept of a Hindu love curriculum that emphasizes the synthesis between transcendental values and contemporary pedagogical practices, an aspect that has not been widely explored in the literature on spiritual education.

KEYWORDS: dharma; finitude of life; love-based education; prema; spirituality.

1. Introduction

Human life is ontologically characterized by limitation, uncertainty, and transience. These conditions are not merely biological facts but existential realities that shape how individuals interpret meaning, suffering, and mortality. Awareness of finitude—the recognition that human existence inevitably culminates in death—constitutes an unavoidable dimension of human experience. In contemporary society, however, this awareness is frequently expressed in the form of anxiety, crises of meaning, and value disorientation, particularly under the pressures of globalization, competition, and the rationalization of social life (Dalrymple, 2024; Okur-Berberoglu, 2024). Education, as a

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formative institution of human consciousness and values, holds a strategic role in mediating this existential condition. Yet, a growing body of literature indicates that modern educational systems are increasingly dominated by an instrumentalist paradigm, prioritizing cognitive performance, technical competence, and competitiveness while marginalizing affective, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Zembylas, 2023; Costa et al., 2024). Such a reductionist orientation not only narrows the scope of learning but also weakens the capacity of education to address fundamental human concerns related to meaning, ethics, and existence.

Criticism of the global education paradigm has grown stronger with the development of global competency and sustainable education frameworks, which, despite promoting values of empathy and social responsibility, are often reduced to measurable behavioral indicators and detached from transcendental ethical foundations (Andrews, 2021; Singer-Brodowski, 2023). This condition contributes to the dehumanization of education, where humans are treated as functional subjects rather than meaningful individuals living in moral, spiritual, and existential relationships (Aberšek et al., 2023). Therefore, an alternative educational approach is needed that is not only competency-oriented but also focuses on the formation of ethical awareness and humanity as a whole.

In the Hindu tradition, the values of Dharma and Prema are two fundamental principles that offer an ethical and spiritual framework for dealing with the realities of life, including finitude. Dharma is understood as the principle of moral truth and cosmic duty that guides humans to live in harmony with ethical and social order, while Prema represents transcendental love that transcends egoistic interests and strengthens human relationships with others, nature, and the Divine (Isser et al., 2024; Nakhare, 2025). The integration of Dharma and Prema not only shapes moral behavior but also strengthens the affective and spiritual dimensions needed by individuals to face suffering, loss, and life's limitations in a reflective and meaningful way.

A number of studies in the last five years show that education based on moral values, spirituality, and love has a positive correlation with psychological well-being, resilience, and the ability of individuals to make sense of life crises. The study by Purwati et al. (2024) confirms that the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action plays an important role in shaping students' character. Similar findings are also shown by Khongsankham et al. (2024) and Zilva (2023), who state that social-emotional learning rooted in ethical values can increase empathy, self-control, and mental health. In the context of Hindu religious education, research by Astawa et al. (2025) and Sudarsana & Andriyani (2024) shows that the integration of Dharma values in education contributes to the formation of moral awareness and ecological concern. However, these studies generally do not explicitly position Dharma and Prema as the conceptual basis of a love curriculum aimed at helping students deal with the finitude of life. This is where the research gap of this study lies. Although recent studies have highlighted the importance of moral and spiritual education, these approaches often remain fragmented and insufficiently grounded in a coherent philosophical framework that integrates ethical, affective, and existential dimensions. In particular, the potential of Dharma and Prema as an integrated pedagogical foundation for addressing the finitude of life remains underexplored, especially in relation to curriculum design.

Theoretically, the idea of a Hindu-based Dharma and Prema curriculum is in line with the latest developments in humanistic education theory and transformative learning. Humanistic education emphasizes holistic human development, including cognitive, affective, moral, and spiritual dimensions, as prerequisites for the formation of a whole person (Mansir, 2022; Okur-Berberoglu, 2024). Meanwhile, transformative learning theory asserts that meaningful learning occurs when individuals reflect on their deepest assumptions about themselves, life, and the meaning of existence (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022; Singer-Brodowski, 2023). In this framework, Dharma functions as a normative orientation for action, while Prema enriches the learning experience with dimensions of love, empathy, and existential connectedness. In response to this gap, this study aims to formulate a conceptual model for revitalizing Dharma and Prema as the

foundation of a Hindu curriculum of love oriented toward confronting the finitude of life. By synthesizing classical Hindu teachings with contemporary educational theory and empirical insights, this research seeks to offer a holistic framework that bridges ethical orientation, affective engagement, and existential meaning.

The urgency of this research becomes even more apparent when linked to the Indonesian social context. Various recent studies report an increase in mental health problems, moral degradation, and a weakening of spiritual awareness among adolescents and students, which is inseparable from an educational model that overemphasizes academic achievement and neglects the cultivation of values (Eksantoso, 2025; Iqbal et al., 2024). Facing the finitude of life is not merely a rational issue, but an existential issue that demands depth of values and spirituality. Therefore, the development of a curriculum that integrates transcendental values is an urgent need, not just a pedagogical option.

Based on this explanation, this study aims to formulate a conceptual model of the revitalization of Dharma and Prema as the foundation of a Hindu love curriculum in facing the finitude of life. The originality of this study lies in its attempt to synthesize two core Hindu concepts, namely Dharma and Prema, into a love education curriculum framework oriented towards the formation of ethical awareness, spiritual resilience, and meaning of life. Unlike previous studies that tended to examine spiritual or character education separately, this study offers an integrative approach that places moral values and love at the core of educational practice. Thus, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of value-based educational studies and practically to the formulation of a more humanistic Hindu educational curriculum that is relevant to the challenges of modern humanity.

2. Methods

2.1 Research approach and design

This study adopts an interpretive qualitative approach with a combined design integrating library research and field-based inquiry. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research was not to test the relationship between variables quantitatively, but rather to formulate a conceptual model of the revitalization of Dharma and Prema values as the foundation of a Hindu love curriculum in facing the finitude of life. Ontologically, this study views spiritual education as a construction of values and meanings formed through the interaction between normative religious texts and the social practices of Hindus. Epistemologically, this research is based on an interpretive paradigm, which seeks to understand the reality of Hindu education from the perspective of the subjects who experience it through text interpretation, experience, and collective reflection. Thus, the knowledge produced is contextual, reflective, and existentially meaningful (Mezirow, 2000). Although empirical data are incorporated through interviews and FGDs, this study remains primarily conceptual in orientation. The field data function as an interpretive and contextual grounding, enabling the development of a theoretically robust and experientially informed framework rather than aiming at statistical generalization.

2.2 Research setting and participants

Field research was conducted in two locations considered representative in the context of Hindu spirituality and education, namely Bali, Indonesia, which represents contemporary Hindu practices in the context of a multicultural Southeast Asian society, with a religious education system that is relatively integrated into social and cultural life, and Varanasi, India, which represents the continuity of classical Hindu traditions and is a center of Hindu spirituality and religious education, both traditional and modern. The selection of these two locations was based on historical, cultural, and philosophical considerations. Bali reflects the adaptation of the values of Dharma and Prema in a modern context, while Varanasi represents the philosophical and spiritual roots of Hinduism in responding to human

existential problems. The research was conducted over a period of six months, from January to June 2025.

The research population includes religious leaders, educators, academics, and Hindu spiritual practitioners who have a deep understanding of the concepts of Dharma, Prema, and spirituality-based educational practices. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the following criteria, Hindu religious leaders (priests, *sulinggih*, brahmins) who are active in values education and spiritual guidance for the community, Hindu educators (teachers and lecturers of Hindu religious education) who understand the integration of religious values into the formal curriculum, and spiritual practitioners and Hindu students who are actively involved in educational activities or religious discussions. There were 24 informants in the field research, consisting of 12 informants from Bali and 12 informants from Varanasi. This number is considered adequate to achieve data depth and thematic saturation in qualitative research.

2.3 Types, sources of data, and data collection techniques

This study uses two types of data, namely Primary data, in the form of in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with key informants in Bali and Varanasi. Secondary data, including Hindu sacred texts (such as the Bhagavad Gītā, Vedas, and Upaniṣads), academic books, recent scientific journal articles, and previous research relevant to spiritual education, moral values, existential well-being, and love-based curricula. Data collection was carried out using the three techniques, Library research, In-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The first is Library research, this was done by reviewing classical and contemporary literature related to the concepts of Dharma, Prema, spiritual education, humanistic learning, and transcendental value-based curricula. Secondly, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 key informants (8 in Bali and 8 in Varanasi) to explore conceptual understanding and practical experiences regarding the implementation of Dharma and Prema in education. Thirdly, focus group discussion (FGD), FGDs were conducted in two groups, one in Bali and one in Varanasi, with four participants per group. These group discussions aimed to obtain collective perspectives and the dynamics of shared meanings related to the revitalization of Dharma and Prema in the Hindu education curriculum.

2.4 Data analysis techniques and methodological justification

Data analysis was conducted through an iterative thematic process involving three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This approach enabled the identification of core themes and the construction of a conceptual synthesis grounded in both textual and empirical data.

The use of a combination of literature review and field research was chosen to produce a conceptual framework that is not only theoretically sound, but also rooted in the actual practice of Hindu education. Bali provides an empirical context for how Dharma and Prema are adapted in modern education and social life, while Varanasi provides the philosophical and spiritual depth that represents the classical Hindu tradition. With this approach, the formulated Hindu love curriculum model is expected to have theoretical validity, philosophical depth, and practical relevance in helping individuals deal with the finitude of life in a meaningful way.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Revitalization of dharma and prema as a strategy for rehumanizing education

The revitalization of Dharma in this study is not merely a moral appeal, but rather a response to the crisis in the contemporary educational paradigm. Various studies show that global education is increasingly characterized by a tendency toward instrumentalism:

competencies are measured, results are standardized, and “success” is narrowed down to cognitive achievement or technical performance (Costa et al., 2024; Zembylas, 2023). In such a framework, moral and spiritual values often appear as curriculum ornaments mentioned as goals, but do not obtain adequate pedagogical tools to be embodied in learning practices.

The most serious impact of instrumentalism is not only the failure to build character, but also dehumanization: students are seen as units of performance, rather than meaningful individuals who face suffering, loss, anxiety, and the reality of life's limitations (Aberšek et al., 2023; Okur-Berberoglu, 2024). At this point, the revitalization of Dharma becomes a pedagogical agenda because Dharma provides an ethical-spiritual framework that works on two levels simultaneously, shaping social character, and restoring existential meaning. In other words, this study positions Dharma as the antithesis to the reduction of humanity in education: Dharma returns education to its humanitarian mandate of shaping moral awareness, responsibility, and a harmonious way of life.

Field findings show that Dharma is ineffective when positioned as a normative dogma taught unilaterally. When Dharma is only present as “teaching material” and not as a “way of life,” it loses its transformative power. Therefore, the revitalization of Dharma in this study is placed on conceptual reconstruction: Dharma as a pedagogical category that contains three operational dimensions. In this study, Dharma is not understood as a set of moral norms that exist outside the subject, but as a pedagogical category that lives within human experience. Dharma is present as an inner orientation that guides individuals in assessing, choosing, and carrying out daily actions. It does not function as rigid rules that demand formal obedience, but as an ethical compass that helps students distinguish which actions are appropriate and meaningful in the context of real life. In this sense, Dharma provides direction, not just prohibitions or commands, so that moral values are not experienced as an external burden, but as an internal awareness that develops through reflection and experience.

Furthermore, Dharma forms a structure of responsibility that places humans in an ethical relationship with the world around them. This responsibility is not individualistic, but relational: humans are understood as beings who are connected to others, the community, nature, and transcendental reality. Field findings show that when Dharma is taught as an awareness of this interconnectedness, education no longer focuses solely on personal achievement, but on the formation of a moral commitment to communal life. Thus, Dharma fosters a sense of responsibility that does not arise from fear of punishment, but from the understanding that every action has ethical implications for the social and cosmic order (Rumahuru & Talupun, 2021; Hidayah, 2025).

At a deeper level, Dharma functions as a framework of meaning that connects human actions with a horizon that transcends pragmatic interests. Through Dharma, ethical actions do not stop at compliance with social norms, but are interpreted as participation in cosmic and spiritual order. It is this dimension that makes Dharma relevant in facing the finitude of life. When individuals realize that life is limited and fragile, Dharma provides an interpretive lens for understanding suffering, loss, and death not as absurdities, but as part of a meaningful order. Education that integrates Dharma at this level helps students not only to “do good,” but also to understand why an ethical life remains meaningful even in the face of existential limitations.

Thus, Dharma in the context of education appears as a pedagogical process that shapes ethical orientation, fosters relational responsibility, and expands the meaning of life. It works simultaneously in the realms of action, moral consciousness, and existential meaning. Within this framework, the revitalization of Dharma cannot be reduced to merely strengthening religious teaching materials, but must be understood as an effort to shape human beings who are able to live with clear moral direction, mature social responsibility, and inner fortitude in facing the finitude of life (Sari & Ariyoga, 2023; Muthma'innah, 2023).

In this study, Prema is understood not as a spontaneous emotion or sentimental attitude, but as a spiritual force that drives human ethical relations with the world. Prema presents a quality of love that transcends self-interest, connecting individuals with others,

the community, nature, and transcendental reality. In the context of education, Prema works as a force that enlivens values, making Dharma not merely a moral obligation, but an inner calling that is lived with awareness and love. This finding indicates that Prema does not merely function as an inner motivation, but operates as a transformative affective force that facilitates the internalization of ethical values. When values are mediated through love, they are no longer perceived as external demands, but as personally meaningful orientations. In this sense, Prema transforms ethical obligations into lived commitments, enabling students to embody values through conscious and willing engagement rather than compliance.

Field findings show that when education emphasizes norms, rules, and responsibilities without the dimension of love, values tend to be experienced as external pressure. Conversely, Prema allows these values to be experienced as relationships: relationships with other people, with suffering, and with the meaning of life itself. Thus, Prema functions as an affective-spiritual energy that bridges the gap between “knowing what is good” and “living what is good.” In the Balinese context, Prema is more often interpreted horizontally and socially. It is present in practices of mutual cooperation, communal solidarity, interfaith tolerance, and concern for the weak. Love is not expressed in abstract discourse, but in concrete actions that strengthen social cohesion (Ardiyani et al., 2025). Educators emphasize that students learn Prema not through lectures on love, but through direct involvement in experiences of sharing, serving, and working together (Surpi et al., 2025). In this way, Prema shapes empathy and social sensitivity, while fostering the awareness that life is meaningful when lived in mutually supportive relationships.

In Varanasi, Prema is more predominantly understood as a vertical and transcendental dimension, especially through the practice of bhakti. Prema is interpreted as love for God that leads individuals to humility, acceptance, and surrender. In interviews, spiritual practitioners emphasized that Prema in the form of bhakti helps humans transcend the fear of suffering and death. By loving the Divine, individuals experience a connection with a reality broader than themselves, so that the limitations of life are no longer felt as an absolute threat. Prema, in this context, functions as a mechanism of existential transcendence.

These two interpretations, horizontal in Bali and vertical in Varanasi, show that Prema has a broad spectrum. However, this spectrum is not dichotomous. In fact, this study shows that social love gains depth when it is supported by spirituality, while spiritual love gains relevance when it is manifested in social relationships. In education, Prema works most effectively when it bridges these two dimensions: fostering social empathy and inner depth. Thus, Prema in a pedagogical context is not merely “teaching to do good,” but forming an inner disposition that enables individuals to face life, including suffering and transience, with openness, care, and calmness. Education that integrates Prema helps students develop an affective sensitivity that is not superficial, but rooted in spiritual awareness and meaningful relationships.

The synthesis between Dharma and Prema is at the core of this research finding. The two are not understood as two separate values, but as two dimensions that condition each other in the formation of a whole human being. Dharma provides ethical direction and structure, while Prema provides the power of love that moves and softens that structure. Without Dharma, Prema risks falling into unguided affection; without Prema, Dharma risks becoming rigid morality that loses its human dimension. Within the framework of the Hindu love curriculum, Dharma and Prema form a dialectical relationship. Dharma answers the question of how humans should live, while Prema answers the question of why ethical living is worth pursuing despite its limitations. When the two are combined, education no longer stops at shaping obedient behavior, but moves toward a transformation of consciousness, shifting individuals' perspectives on themselves, others, and life (Moyer & Sinclair, 2020).

The findings from Bali and Varanasi show that this synthesis is not merely a theoretical construct, but a reality that lives on in educational and spiritual practices. Bali emphasizes how Dharma and Prema are manifested in concrete social actions, strengthening responsibility and empathy in communal life. Varanasi emphasizes how these two values are deepened through philosophical reflection and spiritual practice, building inner

strength in the face of suffering and death. When these two approaches are brought together, a holistic educational framework emerges: humans are shaped as responsible social beings as well as spiritual beings who are aware of their limitations.

The Dharma–Prema synthesis also provides an answer to the problem of the finitude of life. Dharma helps individuals accept the limitations of life as part of moral and cosmic order, while Prema enables individuals to live with those limitations with love, not fear. In this perspective, finitude is not understood as a failure of existence, but as a context in which values and love find their meaning. Education based on this synthesis equips the younger generation not only with academic abilities, but also with ethical resilience and spiritual depth. Thus, the Hindu love-based curriculum of Dharma and Prema can be understood as an effort to re-humanize education. It rejects the reduction of education to merely a tool for producing competencies, and returns it to its basic mission: to shape human beings who are capable of living meaningful, responsible, and loving lives amid the limitations of life. This synthesis also affirms the original contribution of the research, namely offering a paradigm of education based on transcendental values rooted in the Hindu tradition, yet universally relevant to contemporary societies facing a crisis of meaning and humanity.

3.2 The role of dharma and prema as the foundation of the love curriculum

This study departs from the assumption that the curriculum is not merely an administrative or technical learning tool, but rather a value architecture that shapes the way humans understand themselves, others, and life. In the context of the contemporary humanitarian crisis marked by moral degradation, increasing existential anxiety, and social disconnection, a curriculum that only emphasizes cognitive achievement has proven to be inadequate. Empirical data and recent studies show that modern education requires a foundation of values that can address the ethical and existential issues of students (Zembylas, 2023; Dalrymple, 2024; Okur-Berberoglu, 2024). It is within this framework that Dharma and Prema are positioned as the foundation of the Hindu curriculum of love.

Conceptually, Dharma and Prema represent two different but interdependent dimensions. Dharma provides a normative structure and ethical orientation that guides human actions, while Prema brings the energy of love and affective-spiritual depth that enlivens that structure. Without Dharma, love-based education risks losing its ethical direction and falling into emotional relativism. Conversely, without Prema, value-based education risks becoming rigid, legalistic, and detached from the inner experience of learners. This argument finds strong support in the findings of this field research. Interview and FGD data in Bali show that educators interpret Dharma as the ethical foundation of the curriculum that governs discipline, social responsibility, and relational harmony. A Hindu teacher in Gianyar emphasized that

“A curriculum without Dharma only trains intelligence, but does not shape character.” (A Hindu teacher)

This statement reflects the empirical experience that religious learning that emphasizes memorization of concepts without ethical praxis does not result in lasting behavioral change. Therefore, in Bali, Dharma is positioned as the foundation of the curriculum through concrete activities such as *ngayah*, involvement in *yadnya*, and school social projects. These practices are not understood as additional activities, but as the core of values learning.

However, field data also shows that Dharma alone is not enough. In FGDs in Bali, several educators acknowledged that an ethical approach that overemphasizes social obligations can cause moral fatigue in students, especially when it is not balanced with affective and reflective dimensions. This is where Prema plays an important role. Prema is understood as an element that enables students to carry out ethical obligations with awareness and willingness, not coercion. One informant stated that

“Children will do Dharma sincerely if they learn to love, not just because they are told to.”
(A Hindu teacher)

This finding indicates that *Prema* operates as an intrinsic motivational force that reinforces the internalization of values within the learning process. In the context of Hindu education, such internalization is not merely cognitive but also affective, shaping attitudes and behavioral orientations. The interplay between *Dharma* as a normative framework and *Prema* as an affective driver becomes particularly evident when examined through participants’ lived experiences and reflections. To further explore this dynamic, qualitative insights were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), allowing for a deeper understanding of how these concepts are interpreted and practiced in educational settings.

Table 1. Summary of focus group discussion (FGD) findings on *dharma* and *prema* in Hindu education

Analytical Dimension	FGD Findings in Bali	FGD Findings in Varanasi	Interpretive Analysis
Understanding of <i>Dharma</i>	<i>Dharma</i> is understood as a guide for everyday ethical conduct, embodied in discipline, communal service (<i>ngayah</i>), and social responsibility	<i>Dharma</i> is understood as a cosmic law and spiritual duty that orients human life toward transcendence and <i>moksha</i>	<i>Dharma</i> operates through two complementary dimensions: social-practical (Bali) and transcendental-philosophical (Varanasi)
Function of <i>Dharma</i> in education	Formation of social character, moral discipline, and communal harmony	Formation of inner moral awareness and existential readiness to confront suffering and death	<i>Dharma</i> functions both as an ethical structure and a framework of meaning within the curriculum
Understanding of <i>Prema</i>	<i>Prema</i> is interpreted as horizontal love: empathy, solidarity, tolerance, and care for others	<i>Prema</i> is interpreted as vertical love (<i>bhakti</i>): devotion and unconditional love toward the Divine	<i>Prema</i> manifests through two pedagogical channels: social (horizontal) and spiritual (vertical)
Role of <i>Prema</i> in learning processes	Motivates students to practice <i>Dharma</i> willingly and sincerely rather than through obligation	Cultivates inner peace, reduces existential anxiety, and fosters acceptance of human finitude	<i>Prema</i> functions as an affective-spiritual energy that animates ethical values
Experience of finitude (<i>finitas kehidupan</i>)	Finitude is interpreted through social responsibility and communal engagement	Finitude is interpreted through spiritual reflection, meditation, and devotional practice	Curriculum design should integrate practical and contemplative approaches to existential challenges
Critiques of current education	Overemphasis on academic achievement with insufficient character formation	Excessive theoretical orientation when not balanced by spiritual practice	Contemporary education requires ethical and affective integration
Participants’ recommendations	Integrate <i>Dharma</i> and <i>Prema</i> through social projects, value reflection, and ethical habituation	Integrate <i>Dharma</i> and <i>Prema</i> through scriptural study, meditation, and spiritual cultivation	A Hindu curriculum of love should be designed holistically across cognitive, practical, and spiritual domains

The findings in Varanasi deepen this argument from a different perspective. Brahmins and academics emphasize that a Dharma-based curriculum without *Prema* will result in dry ethical knowledge that is separated from spiritual experience. In an interview, a Hindu philosophy lecturer stated that

“Dharma without bhakti easily becomes empty morality; it is conceptually correct, but weak in the face of suffering and death.” (Lecturer of Hindu religious education)

This statement confirms that Prema in the form of bhakti and transcendental love provides an existential resilience that ethical norms alone cannot provide. Data from student focus group discussions in Varanasi shows that Prema helps them deal with anxiety about the finitude of life. Several students stated that the practice of bhakti and meditation provides peace when facing loss and uncertainty in life. In the context of the curriculum, this means that Prema is not merely an added value, but an essential component that enables the curriculum to address the deepest dimensions of human experience. These findings are in line with studies showing that education based on love and spirituality contributes to psychological resilience and existential well-being (Khongsankham et al., 2024; Zilva, 2023).

Based on data from Bali and Varanasi, this study argues that Dharma and Prema should be positioned as the foundation of a love-based curriculum, not as two separate subjects or values taught in a fragmented manner. This foundation works by forming an ethical framework as well as an affective learning climate. Dharma directs the content and objectives of the curriculum in terms of what is considered valuable and worth learning, while Prema shapes the way these values are transmitted and internalized. Thus, the Hindu love curriculum not only teaches “what is right,” but also guides students to “live the truth with love.”

This argument has direct implications for curriculum design. Field data show that the integration of Dharma and Prema is most effective when the curriculum combines reflective learning, social praxis, and affective-spiritual exercises. In Bali, community service accompanied by value reflection strengthens the Dharma dimension, while the cultivation of empathy and togetherness strengthens Prema. In Varanasi, textual study and philosophical reflection combined with bhakti practice and meditation demonstrate how the curriculum can build ethical and spiritual depth simultaneously. Both contexts confirm that the Hindu love curriculum must be designed as a learning experience that touches the minds, actions, and hearts of students.

Thus, the role of Dharma and Prema as the foundation of the love curriculum is not symbolic, but structural. Both form a value framework that enables education to respond to contemporary challenges: moral crisis, social alienation, and existential anxiety. A curriculum based on Dharma and Prema equips the younger generation not only with knowledge and skills, but also with direction in life and the power of love to deal with human limitations in a meaningful way. This is the main contribution of this research to the development of transcendental value-based education amid the demands of the modern world.

3.3 Dharma prema as the foundation of the hindu love curriculum: A synthesis of global Hindu teachings

The curriculum of love in Hinduism, as formulated in this study, is not intended as a pedagogical innovation detached from tradition, but rather as a synthesis between the legacy of Hindu teachings and contemporary global educational challenges. This synthesis is important because modern education is caught between the tension of global universalism and the particularity of local traditions. Various global educational frameworks such as global competencies, sustainable education, and social-emotional education seek to develop empathetic and responsible individuals, but often get caught up in technocratic approaches that measure values through behavioral indicators without ethical and spiritual depth (Andrews, 2021; Zembylas, 2023; Costa et al., 2024). In this context, the Hindu love curriculum offers a corrective contribution by presenting values as life experiences rooted in moral and spiritual awareness.

The synthesis of global Hindu teachings in the love curriculum stems from empirical findings in Bali and Varanasi. These two contexts show that the Hindu tradition is not

singular but has a broad spectrum of practices and reflections. Bali represents a form of Hinduism that is integrated with local social and cultural life, where Dharma and Prema are manifested in communal actions, social harmony, and ecological concern. Varanasi, on the other hand, represents the continuity of Hindu philosophical and spiritual traditions, with an emphasis on metaphysical reflection, contemplation, and the search for liberation (*moksha*). This difference is often understood as a dichotomy between the “practical” and the “spiritual,” but this study shows that the two actually form two complementary poles.

From a theoretical perspective, this synthesis is in line with critiques of fragmented values education. Humanistic education theory asserts that humans cannot be reduced to cognitive aspects alone, but must be understood as beings who have a need for meaning, relationships, and the actualization of values (Mansir, 2022; Okur-Berberoglu, 2024). Meanwhile, transformative learning theory emphasizes that meaningful change occurs when individuals reflect on their deepest assumptions about themselves and the world, rather than merely adjusting their behavior superficially (Hoggan & Hoggan-Kloubert, 2022; Singer-Brodowski, 2023). The Hindu love curriculum operates at the intersection of these two theories: it structures learning experiences to simultaneously engage the reflective, practical, and spiritual dimensions.

Within this framework, Dharma and Prema function as the axis of synthesis. Dharma provides a normative structure that protects education from value relativism, while Prema ensures that this structure does not turn into rigid moral legalism. The synthesis of the two allows the curriculum to move beyond a purely normative model of character education. This is important because a number of studies show that character education that only emphasizes compliance with rules tends to fail to form long-term moral commitment (Jamil et al., 2023; Purwati et al., 2024). Conversely, values become sustainable when supported by affective engagement and the personal meaning of the role played by Prema in the curriculum of love.

A dialogue with previous publications also reveals the uniqueness of Hindu contributions. Studies on social-emotional learning (SEL) emphasize empathy, emotional regulation, and relational skills as keys to student success (Khongsankham et al., 2024; Zilva, 2023). However, these approaches are often psychological in nature and detached from any metaphysical or spiritual foundation. The Hindu curriculum of love expands the horizons of SEL by placing empathy and love within a cosmic and spiritual context (Beaton et al., 2021; Terbeck et al., 2021). Prema not only cultivates emotional sensitivity but also directs love toward something beyond the self, both in social and transcendental relationships. Thus, love does not stop at adaptive functions but becomes a path to the formation of meaning in life.

Furthermore, this synthesis of global Hindu teachings also dialogues with the discourse of education for sustainability. Sustainable education demands a paradigm shift from exploitation to harmony with nature, but often faces obstacles when ecological values are taught normatively without inner internalization (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2022; Bonilla-Jurado et al., 2024). In the Hindu context, the principles of Dharma and Prema as practiced in Bali show that a harmonious relationship with nature is not merely a matter of policy or behavior, but an ethical and spiritual expression. This synthesis shows that the Hindu love curriculum can contribute to sustainable education by providing a deeper foundation of values rooted in cosmic consciousness.

Thus, the Hindu love curriculum as a synthesis of global Hindu teachings can be understood as a holistic education model that integrates three main dimensions: (1) social praxis and ethical responsibility, (2) philosophical reflection and spiritual awareness, and (3) the appreciation of love as a transformative force. This model does not reject the universalism of global education, but critiques it from within by offering an alternative paradigm: education as a process of humanization that structures actions, consciousness, and the meaning of life.

This argument asserts that Hinduism's contribution to global education does not lie in the exoticism of tradition, but in its ability to synthesize ethics, spirituality, and love within a single pedagogical framework. The Hindu curriculum of love shows that education can be

a space where humans learn to face life's limitations with moral responsibility and spiritual depth, not merely with adaptive skills. In the context of the humanitarian and meaning crisis that plagues the modern world, this synthesis offers a new direction for the development of a more humane, reflective, and transcendental value-based curriculum.

3.4 Hindu love curriculum as a transformative education paradigm

The discussion in the previous sub-chapter shows that the Hindu love curriculum cannot be understood merely as an additional value education model, but rather as an alternative pedagogical paradigm that responds to the contemporary humanitarian crisis. This crisis is not only evident in moral degradation and social conflict, but also in increasing existential anxiety, feelings of alienation, and a loss of meaning in life among students. Modern education, which tends to be oriented towards performance and measurable competencies, often fails to provide the reflective and spiritual space that humans need to face the reality of life's limitations and transience. It is in this context that the Hindu love-based curriculum of Dharma and Prema demonstrates its relevance as a transformative approach.

The main novelty of this research lies in the repositioning of Dharma and Prema as the structural foundations of the curriculum, rather than merely as normative values or religious teaching materials. Previous studies have tended to examine Hindu education in the context of rituals, general character education, or spirituality separately (Merritt et al., 2020; Das & Sarkar, 2025). This study goes beyond these approaches by developing a conceptual and empirical synthesis that places Dharma as an ethical and meaningful framework, and Prema as an affective-spiritual energy that enlivens the educational process. Thus, Dharma and Prema are no longer understood as abstract teachings, but as operational pedagogical categories that shape the orientation of the curriculum, learning methods, and learning experiences of students.

The second novelty lies in the cross-context comparative approach (Bali–Varanasi), which is rarely done in Hindu education studies. Bali represents contextual, social, and ecological Hindu praxis, while Varanasi represents the philosophical and spiritual depth of classical Hinduism. This study shows that these two contexts are not in opposition, but in a dialectical relationship that complements each other. From Bali, the curriculum of love gains the practical power of how values are manifested in social action and communal responsibility. From Varanasi, the curriculum of love gains the reflective depth of how values are supported by transcendental awareness and inner discipline. This synthesis is the original contribution of this research, as it presents a model of Hindu education that is socially and spiritually holistic.

Theoretically, this research expands the discourse of humanistic education and transformative learning by explicitly incorporating the transcendental dimension. If humanistic education emphasizes self-actualization and transformative learning emphasizes critical reflection, then the Hindu curriculum of love adds a cosmic and spiritual horizon as the foundation for the meaning of life. This integration responds to criticism of modern educational approaches that often separate competency development from the formation of meaning in life (Arti et al., 2024; Thuong & Untara, 2024). In the Hindu love curriculum, learning aims not only to shape adaptive individuals, but also humans who are capable of living life with ethical awareness, love, and inner strength. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study confirm that the Hindu love curriculum works effectively when designed as a learning experience that simultaneously touches on three domains: cognitive-reflective, social praxis, and affective-spiritual. Dharma provides ethical direction and boundaries for learning, while Prema creates a climate of love that allows these values to be deeply internalized (Parmilyasari, 2024). This integration prevents two extremes in values education: rigid morality without empathy, and emotional affection without ethical direction. Thus, the Hindu love curriculum offers a balance between structure and warmth, between duty and love.

Another important contribution is the affirmation that education has an existential role in helping humans face the finitude of life. Field findings show that students in both Bali and Varanasi seek meaning, peace, and direction in life amid uncertainty. The Hindu love curriculum responds to this need by teaching active acceptance through Dharma and the transcendence of love through Prema. The finitude of life is no longer understood as a paralyzing threat, but as a context in which values and love find their meaning. Thus, education does not stop at its instrumental function, but becomes a space for the formation of morally and spiritually mature human beings (Begum et al., 2022; Chu & Vu, 2022). In closing, it can be asserted that the Hindu love curriculum based on Dharma and Prema is a conceptual and practical contribution to the development of education based on transcendental values. This study shows that Hindu teachings are not only relevant in an internal religious context, but can also offer a paradigm for global education that is seeking a new direction amid a humanitarian crisis. The Hindu love curriculum proposes a vision of education as a holistic humanization process: shaping individuals who are socially responsible, spiritually aware, and able to live with the limitations of life with meaning and love.

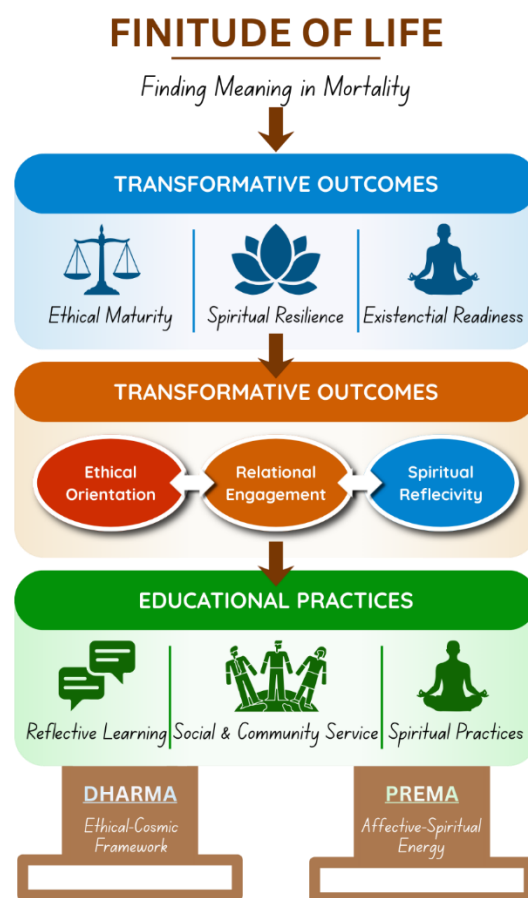


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of Hindu love curriculum based on dharma and prema

Thus, the results and discussion of this study confirm that the revitalization of Dharma and Prema in the curriculum is not nostalgia for past traditions, but a visionary pedagogical strategy for the future of education. In an increasingly complex and uncertain world, the Hindu love curriculum offers an important possibility: education that not only enlightens the mind, but also cultivates wisdom of the heart and depth of meaning in life. This is illustrated in the following Figure 1. This study offers conceptual novelty by developing the Hindu Love Curriculum as a transformative educational paradigm rooted in the synthesis of Dharma and Prema values. Unlike previous studies that tend to position Hindu education within the framework of ritual, general character education, or partial spirituality, this

study repositions Dharma and Prema as structural pedagogical categories that holistically shape ethical orientation, learning processes, and educational goals.

The main novelty of this research lies in three aspects. First, this research constructs Dharma not only as a moral norm, but as a cosmic and existential framework that enables students to interpret the limitations and transience of life responsibly. Second, this research positions Prema not merely as an emotion or affective attitude, but as a transformative spiritual energy that connects ethics with the experience of love and the meaning of life. Third, through a comparative Bali–Varanasi approach, this study presents a cross-context synthesis between Hindu socio-ecological praxis and contemplative-philosophical depth, which has rarely been combined in educational studies. Thus, this study makes an original contribution to the discourse on transcendental value-based education by showing that education can function as a space for shaping human beings who are not only cognitively intelligent, but also morally mature, spiritually resilient, and existentially prepared to face the finitude of life.

The Hindu love curriculum does not merely complement existing educational paradigms but challenges their underlying assumptions. While global frameworks such as social-emotional learning and education for sustainability emphasize empathy and responsibility, they often lack a transcendental grounding that connects values to deeper existential meaning. In this regard, the integration of Dharma and Prema offers not only a pedagogical alternative but a philosophical reorientation of education itself—from a system of performance optimization toward a process of existential formation

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the integration of Dharma and Prema constitutes not merely a pedagogical innovation, but a paradigmatic shift in understanding the purpose of education. By repositioning these concepts as structural foundations of a curriculum, this research highlights the possibility of education as a process of ethical formation, affective cultivation, and existential meaning-making. In the context of the contemporary humanitarian crisis characterized by moral degradation, the breakdown of social relations, and increasing existential anxiety, education is required to return to its basic mandate, namely to shape individuals who are capable of living meaningful, responsible, and loving lives. Through conceptual studies and field findings in Bali and Varanasi, this research shows that the values of Dharma and Prema have strategic potential to respond to these challenges if they are pedagogically revitalized in the form of a Hindu love curriculum.

The results of the study show that Dharma and Prema cannot be understood separately. Dharma functions as an ethical and cosmic framework that provides moral direction and a structure of meaning in human life, while Prema functions as an affective-spiritual energy that brings these ethical values to life through love, empathy, and transcendental connectedness. The synthesis of the two results in a holistic approach to education, which not only shapes ethical behavior but also fosters spiritual resilience and existential readiness in the face of the finitude of life. Empirical findings from Bali emphasize the importance of social praxis and communal responsibility, while findings from Varanasi emphasize reflective and contemplative depth as the foundation of life's meaning. When combined, the two present a complete Hindu educational model that is relevant to the needs of the times.

The main contribution of this research lies in a paradigm shift: Dharma and Prema are repositioned not merely as normative teachings or religious values, but as the structural foundation of a curriculum that shapes educational goals, learning processes, and outcomes. Thus, the Hindu love curriculum offered is not nostalgic or ritualistic, but visionary and transformative. It opens up space for education to function as a process of humanization that simultaneously touches on the cognitive, social praxis, affective, and spiritual dimensions. This research also provides theoretical and practical implications for the development of transcendental value-based education. Theoretically, these findings expand

the discourse of humanistic education and transformative learning by incorporating cosmic and spiritual dimensions as sources of meaning in life.

Practically, the Hindu love curriculum based on Dharma and Prema can be implemented in formal and non-formal education through reflective learning, social service, and integrated spiritual practice. This model is not only relevant to the Hindu community but can also be an inspiration for multicultural and interfaith education, as the values of truth and love are universal. In conclusion, this study emphasizes that facing the finitude of life is not a problem that can be answered by instrumental rationality alone. Education that fosters ethical awareness and spiritual depth is needed so that humans can live with meaning and love despite life's limitations. The Hindu love curriculum based on Dharma and Prema offers an important possibility in this direction: an educational paradigm that not only educates the mind, but also shapes the wisdom of the heart and inner strength in an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

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Author Contribution

Prasanthi Devi Maheswari conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, conducted data analysis, and prepared the original manuscript draft. I Ketut Wardana contributed to methodology development, data validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. Ravinder Nath provided theoretical guidance, supervised the analytical process, and contributed to manuscript review and editing. Ni Luh Ersania assisted in data collection, field investigation, and research administration. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Ethical Review Board Statement

This study adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants, including interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). All participants provided informed consent voluntarily after receiving a clear explanation of the study's objectives and procedures. Participant confidentiality was ensured through anonymization, and all data were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study prior to data collection. Participants were provided with clear information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, with access subject to ethical considerations and participant confidentiality.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) utilized OpenAI exclusively for language enhancement and improvement of academic clarity. All generated outputs were carefully reviewed, revised, and validated by the author(s), who assume full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and scholarly integrity of the final content.

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