

Building Dharma-Based Social Infrastructure: The Urgency of Hindu Philanthropy in Alleviating Social Inequality

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ABSTRACT

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The development of social infrastructure plays a critical role in enhancing societal welfare and reducing social disparities. In Indonesia, particularly in Bandar Lampung, the contribution of religious and cultural values—such as Dharma and Hindu generosity—remains underexplored in shaping sustainable social infrastructure. This study aims to investigate how Hindu charitable practices, including *dana punia* (donations), cooperative initiatives, and *seva* (selfless service), influence the development of social infrastructure and to propose a structured framework for integrating these practices into long-term planning. A qualitative research design was employed, combining in-depth interviews with community leaders, participatory observation, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive-analytical and thematic techniques to identify key patterns and challenges. The findings indicate that Hindu generosity significantly supports the construction and maintenance of social infrastructure, yet these efforts are often intermittent, informal, and lack coordination. Based on Dharma principles, the study proposes a systematic framework that aligns traditional charitable practices with organized, sustainable, and scalable social infrastructure development. This framework has the potential to enhance the impact of community-led initiatives, encourage consistent participation, and guide policymakers and religious organizations in designing programs that strengthen social cohesion and welfare.

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INTRODUCTION

Improving community welfare and ensuring fair access to public services depend on social infrastructure development. Public areas that support social cohesiveness and wellbeing, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and places of worship constitute social infrastructure (Enneking et al., 2025; Zahnow, 2024). Still, disparities in access to these essential services persist, particularly in underdeveloped areas marked by limited resources and inadequate government support (Adewunmi et al., 2023; Khiba & Ntlhe, 2024; Maseke & Kachana Liseli, 2022). Dealing with these inequalities calls for different, sustainable solutions, one of which is including Hindu charity values in the building of social infrastructure.

Within Hindu society, Dharma serves as a moral and ethical grounding for group responsibility. Hindu philanthropy, *dana punia* (charitable giving), and *seva* (selfless service) have historically improved societal welfare (Alder, 2015; Paleri, 2023; Pandya, 2014; Sujatindriasih et al., 2023). Nevertheless, these projects usually happen sporadically and lack methodical implementation, which limits their long-lasting impact on reducing social disparity.

Regarding Hindu generosity in constructing social infrastructure, *das sollen* (idealism) and *das sein* (reality) differ somewhat. Although genuine community involvement is limited in breadth and has not yet driven significant structural change, Dharma supports social stability and collective accountability (Das, 2024; Sumedha, 2024). This emphasizes the need to fully use Hindu philanthropy in infrastructure development through a more methodical and value-driven approach.

To include cultural and religious values, recent studies have looked at philanthropy's role in social development and infrastructure building. Philanthropy has been demonstrated to improve community involvement and sustainability in the development of settlement infrastructure (Aunirrouf & Nasihien, 2019; Rochani et al., 2021). Social construction techniques have been used to apply the Balinese relational idea of *Tri Hita Karana* to charitable activities (Budianto et al., 2020). Particularly *zakat*, Islamic generosity has shown its ability to reduce the negative economic effects on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) resulting from infrastructure investments (Harahap et al., 2024). Large indigenous volunteer organizations have effectively used Islamic philanthropy and social entrepreneurship in Pakistan to close social gaps and offer services to the underprivileged, and Islamic donations and social entrepreneurship have been successfully utilized in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2023). These studies draw attention to the need to include religious and cultural values in charitable projects to efficiently build infrastructure and social development. Though a lot of research has been done on how philanthropy affects social development, not much has especially looked at how Dharma might be included in architectural design. By means of the methodical application of Dharma and Hindu philanthropy to support the creation of sustainable social infrastructure, this paper tackles these shortcomings.

Previous research has shown that philanthropy and religious motivated generosity can play a significant role in social development and infrastructure creation. Rochani et al. (2021) demonstrated that community philanthropy in settlement infrastructure improved participation and sustainability, yet their study focused primarily on general community involvement without specifically addressing the integration of religious and cultural values. Similarly, Budianto et al. (2020) applied the Balinese concept of *Tri Hita Karana* to social construction, illustrating the effectiveness of culturally grounded philanthropy, but this approach was context-specific to Bali and did not explore broader Hindu ethical frameworks such as Dharma, *dana*, *punya*, and *sewa*.

This research seeks to (1) examine the principles of Dharma and Hindu philanthropy in the creation of social infrastructure, (2) evaluate their impact on mitigating social disparity, and (3) recommend an effective and sustainable implementation approach. The results are anticipated to yield both scholarly and practical contributions. This study enhances the discussion on Hindu charity in social development. It provides a systematic framework to assist governments, social groups, and Hindu communities in promoting equitable and sustainable infrastructure development.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the role of Hindu philanthropy in facilitating social infrastructure development. It employed

a case study methodology focused on Hindu communities in Bandar Lampung, Indonesia, to explore the complexity and context of Hindu charitable efforts, especially in areas with limited government involvement in infrastructure development.

Data were collected through three complementary methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with 20 key informants, including Hindu religious leaders, community organizers, local benefactors, and policymakers involved in social infrastructure or community development. Participants were selected purposively to represent those directly engaged in philanthropic activities. Semi-structured interviews enabled flexible exploration of their perspectives on Hindu charitable practices, *Dharma* principles, organizational challenges, and the impact of their contributions.

Participatory observation involved active researcher engagement in community-based infrastructure initiatives, such as constructing and renovating temples, public facilities, community centers, and health or education projects funded by Hindu philanthropy. Observations focused on cooperation dynamics (*gotong royong*), decision-making, resource mobilization, and the integration of *Dharma* ideals. Detailed field notes documented interactions, rituals, and behaviors not fully captured in interviews.

Document analysis reviewed relevant materials, including religious texts, community records, reports on philanthropic activities, government policies, and historical archives on Hindu community infrastructure development. These sources provided secondary data to contextualize philanthropy's role within Bandar Lampung's socio-cultural framework.

Data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. This approach enabled systematic identification and interpretation of patterns related to the values, practices, challenges, and potential of Hindu philanthropy in social infrastructure development. Triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents ensured the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, preliminary results were shared with key informants for member validation and confirmation of accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constructing dharma-based social infrastructure is an attempt to provide public facilities and services grounded in moral and spiritual ideals and directed toward physical development. Hinduism's idea of dharma stresses the need to balance personal and group interests, so any growth of social infrastructure should try to equitably and sustainably raise the quality of life of society. Applying the dharma principle helps one to pay attention to the values of fairness, selfless service (*seva*), and universal wellbeing, in addition to stressing material elements.

Dharma emphasizes the need for charity to create environmentally friendly social infrastructure. Hindu values of dharma (moral obligation), *dana punia* (sincere giving), and *seva* (selfless service) form the foundation of the fundamental ideas of philanthropy taught there. In Hinduism, philanthropy is not just a deed but also a means of expressing spiritual knowledge that individual welfare cannot be isolated from society's welfare. One fulfills

moral and spiritual responsibilities advised in several Hindu scriptures by sharing with others, therefore helping those in need (Srivastava et al., 2013).

Philanthropy is included in karma yoga, a selfless deed meant to create virtue and balance in life, in the holy book Bhagavad Gita. By means of karma yoga, one gains spiritual value and contributes to creating a society more fair and rich (Adnyana & Kusuma, 2020; Permadhi & Utama, 2019). Thus, in Hinduism, philanthropy is not only a personal deed but also a group endeavor to produce a better society. Hindu society is supposed to establish harmonic life, help each other, and generate common prosperity based on compassion, fairness, and social responsibility by adopting these ideas of charity.

According to research findings, Hindu communities in Bandar Lampung City have carried out philanthropy in a variety of social events including distributing needs to underprivileged families, giving children from economically poor backgrounds educational help, offering free health services, and building infrastructure and public facilities benefiting the society. Still, these charitable activities are more personal and spontaneous than they are methodically arranged under a solid and lasting institutional framework.

Interviews with several Hindu figures in Bandar Lampung revealed that the main obstacle in optimizing Hindu philanthropy lies in the lack of organization and the dominance of spiritual orientation that emphasizes individual relationships with God (Dewa Yadnya) compared to social and humanitarian aspects. Those findings are shown in the following excerpts:

"The lack of a centralized and organized institution is one of the main obstacles to enhancing Hindu generosity. Many gifts and volunteer work are done singly or in small groups, making a more significant impact challenging. (Interview with a Bandar Lampung Hindu community leader)

"Hindu religious doctrine stresses that their main form of worship is Dewa Yadnya or offerings to the gods. Although social charity is promoted, many people see religious rites as more vital than organized social aid projects." (Interview with a Bandar Lampung temple priest)

Although some social initiatives have been implemented, their application needs to be expanded and strengthened through a more structured system. This study aligns with previous research showing that philanthropy in Hinduism has a strong normative foundation but, in practice, still requires further efforts to bridge the gap between religious idealism and social reality. Therefore, a more systematic strategy is needed to develop Hindu philanthropy to be more effective in providing broad social impact for society.

"We have certain community-driven social projects where we assist the less fortunate in our close vicinity or offer food aid during religious events. Still, these initiatives are sometimes erratic and not part of a well-organized charitable system." (Interview with a Bandar Lampung representative from a young Hindu group)

"We need a methodical approach—such as creating committed organizations or structured programs that go beyond religious rituals and concentrate on larger social benefits—if we wish Hindu philanthropy to be more powerful." (Interview with a Hindu academic, Bandar Lampung)

From sociological and anthropological perspectives, philanthropy is an expression of love for fellow humans that has existed since ancient times, including in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian civilizations. This tradition has developed in two main variants, namely traditional philanthropy that is individual in nature and social justice philanthropy that is oriented toward systemic change (Arpannudin et al., 2021; Kurniati et al., 2023; Payton & Moody, 2008). Religion is important in encouraging philanthropic activities, including Hindu teachings that teach *Susila Hindu Dharma* as a moral guide in social life. In practice, Hindu philanthropy is closely related to the concepts of *Dharma* (moral duty), *Artha* (wealth used for collective welfare), *Kama* (inner satisfaction in giving), and *Moksha* (liberation from suffering through spiritual and moral balance) (Swamy et al., 2021).

Research results show that based on cooperation, Hindu communities in Bandar Lampung City have implemented philanthropy through various social activities, such as educational assistance, health services, and infrastructure development. The following interviews illustrate those findings.

"We often provide poor children in our neighborhood school materials and scholarships. Our philanthropy revolves mostly on education since we think knowledge is a kind of *dharma*—a duty that must be shared." (Interview with a Bandar Lampung Hindu community leader)

"Our temple plans free medical checks and blood donation campaigns in addition to nearby Hindu groups. These projects allow us to serve public health unselfishly or with *Seva*." — (Interview with a Hindu religious leader, Bandar Lampung)

"We have rebuilt public facilities, including highways, community halls, and water supply systems, using *gotong royong*—mutual collaboration. Everyone helps—by labor, supplies, or financial support as well as by expertise." (Interview with a Bandar Lampung local Hindu youth group official)

However, these practices are still personal and not systematically organized within strong institutions. Several Hindu figures emphasize that the application of philanthropic values needs to be supported by more organized structures and synergy with customs and religious organizations. Therefore, a more systematic strategy is needed to develop Hindu philanthropy to be more effective in improving social welfare and reducing inequality in society.

Social infrastructure, including health services, education, and other public facilities, is important in community development. It is built to sustain life and support social relationships (Latham & Layton, 2022). Although there have been improvements in some sectors, such as education and health, social infrastructure is still inadequate in Bandar Lampung. Interview results show that the application of Hindu value-based social development principles is made more personally rather than structurally, leading to a lack of effectiveness in its implementation.

Though social infrastructure still lags, we observe modest improvement in healthcare and education. Roads in some places still show damage, and there are few public venues for community events. Though the administration has tried to improve things, the adjustments remain erratic and gradual. (Interview with a Bandar Lampung Hindu community leader)

"Hindu doctrines stress the need for societal peace and mutual collaboration (gotong royong). Many people and couples live according to these principles, supporting neighbors in need or planning shared religious events. Still, these activities are personal. The community has no organized project aimed at methodically implementing Hindu-based development ideas. (Interview with a Hindu religious leader in Bandar Lampung)

"We aim to preserve dharma and selfless service values, but our efforts don't always result in long-term gains without strong institutional support. For instance, we plan neighborhood clean-up events or assist one another during a crisis; however, as there is no official structure, these events are not going successfully." (Interview with a Hindu religious leader in Bandar Lampung)

Research results show that the condition of social infrastructure in Bandar Lampung City is still not optimal, especially in the education and social services sectors. Interview results reveal that although social infrastructure can improve quality of life, its implementation in Bandar Lampung still faces various obstacles. Some informants stated that educational facilities for Hindus are still limited to the college and kindergarten levels without elementary and high schools. In addition, the development of religious facilities that can support social welfare has not run optimally. These limitations indicate the need for better improvement and organization of social infrastructure to provide broader benefits to society. Therefore, more thorough planning and policy support are needed to ensure that social infrastructure can effectively improve community welfare in Bandar Lampung.

"Education is the basis of societal progress, yet Hindu families in Bandar Lampung battle to choose appropriate schools for their children. Although we have a kindergarten and a college, no elementary or high schools have Hindu foundations. Parents wishing their children to grow up with intellectual and religious education find this challenging." (Interview with Bandar Lampung's Hindu community head)

"Stronger community relations and social wellbeing depend much on religious facilities. Still, the evolution of Hindu religious infrastructure is not ideal in Bandar Lampung. More help is needed to create venues for educational and social events benefiting the larger Hindu population." (Interview with a Hindu religious leader, Bandar Lampung)

"Support and organization are the toughest issues here. Although many people in the community wish for improved social infrastructure, no organized effort exists to bring about it. Improving the city's Hindu educational institutions and social services will be challenging without enough preparation and cooperation." (Interview with a Bandar Lampung local Hindu young group spokesperson)

Social infrastructure development cannot be done instantly but requires a long process, significant costs, and careful planning (Enneking et al., 2025). In Bandar Lampung, social infrastructure development faces various constraints, including budget limitations, uneven geographical distribution of Hindu communities, and lack of active participation from the community. These obstacles hinder the provision of equitable and optimal social services for all levels of society.

Interviews with informants show that budget constraints are the main challenge in social infrastructure development in Bandar Lampung. In addition, geographical constraints make coordination and provision of equitable facilities difficult, especially for Hindu

communities dispersed across various regions. Low community participation also worsens the situation, where many development projects are hampered due to a lack of support and understanding from local communities. The following excerpts show those findings.

"Budget restrictions present one of our main challenges in creating social infrastructure. Although improved facilities are needed, money is sometimes directed towards more pressing concerns. Many initiatives delay or even cancel without enough financial backing." (Interview with a Bandar Lampung Hindu community leader)

"Our community is dispersed over several places. Hence, it is challenging to create centralized facilities that everyone can use. Building a Hindu education center or social service institution calls for careful consideration of accessibility for all members, which is a significant logistical difficulty. (Interview with a Bandar Lampung Hindu community leader)

"Many of the members of our community do not actively support development projects. While some believe the government should handle this, others may not see the advantages. Projects sometimes suffer delays or fail without robust community involvement." (Interview with a Hindu religious leader, Bandar Lampung)

Therefore, more effective strategies are needed to overcome these obstacles, including utilizing social capital, increasing community awareness, and closer collaboration between government, religious organizations, and the community. Thus, social infrastructure development can run more efficiently and provide broader benefits for community welfare.

The integration of Hindu philanthropic values in social infrastructure development is urgent because it can strengthen social solidarity, address gaps in access to infrastructure, preserve cultural identity, promote interfaith harmony, and support sustainable development. Social solidarity in Hindu communities can be strengthened by applying the principles of *seva* (selfless service) and *dana* (charity), which encourage cooperation and active contribution to developing social facilities such as places of worship, *pasraman*, and other social services. By adopting these philanthropic principles, Hindu communities in Bandar Lampung can create a more inclusive and independent social infrastructure.

Apart from fostering societal cohesion, Hindu generosity fills inefficiencies in social infrastructure access. Especially for economically underprivileged people, the ideas of *Dana Punia* and *Seva* inspire communities to offer more fair access to health services and education. Programs include free health services, *pasraman* development, and community-based economic empowerment projects show how these ideals could raise social wellbeing. Therefore, including Hindu charity into the construction of social infrastructure will help to address Bandar Lampung's inequality in access to basic amenities.

Moreover, Hindu generosity is important in maintaining religious principles and cultural identity. In the framework of globalization, which might undermine conventional values, generosity becomes a crucial tool in preserving Hindu civilization. Support for building and preserving temples, community halls, and cultural centers helps young Hindu generations to stay in touch to their ancestral background. Furthermore helping to provide religious instruction, traditional arts training, and religious celebrations enhancing Hindu spiritual identity are the customs of *seva* and *dana punia*.

Moreover, including Hindu charitable principles can help to foster interfaith peace. Tolerance, empathy, and interfaith collaboration are taught by the ideas of Ahimsa—nonviolence—and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the whole world is one family. Hindu ideals have shown through philanthropic activities including disaster assistance, inclusive social programs, and social services to produce better interfaith partnerships. Hindu generosity thus enhances the internal community and fosters harmonic ties with other religious groups.

Lastly, the Hindu charity supports sustainable development with regard to the environment. In Hinduism, the ideas of Ahimsa and Karma Yoga stress moral obligation for the environment and harmony. Reforestation, harnessing renewable energy, and sustainable resource management all represent how Hindu generosity may address contemporary environmental problems. Hindu communities can generate sustainable welfare for the next generations, which is not simply financial, by including this idea in the construction of social infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

Establishing a *dharma*-based social infrastructure requires balancing communal welfare, ethical values, and material progress, with Hindu generosity playing a crucial role in fostering social solidarity through *dharma*, *dana punia*, and *seva* principles. Although philanthropic efforts in Bandar Lampung have begun, they remain sporadic and lack formal organizational structures, hindered by budget constraints, limited community involvement, and poor coordination. These challenges reduce the effectiveness of charitable projects and impede the development of comprehensive social support systems. Institutionalizing philanthropy through systematic approaches, improving cooperation among religious organizations, community groups, and policymakers, and fostering greater community engagement are essential to enhance sustainability and social cohesion. Future research should explore effective models for formalizing Hindu philanthropic activities and assess strategies for policy development, resource mobilization, and community empowerment to sustain *dharma*-based social infrastructure and reduce social inequality.

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