

SANSKRIT *DHARMA* AND JAPANESE *DARUMA*:

## A SEMANTIC STUDY

S. Weeratunge

## Abstract:

The Sanskrit word *dharma* and its Japanese counterpart *daruma*, have undergone considerable semantic development in the course of their use over a long period of time. The Japanese word *daruma*, in particular, though derived from the Sanskrit *dharma*, shows interesting semantic developments, some of which are at variance with those of the Sanskrit original. In this paper, the author has discussed briefly some of these semantic developments; that are evident in their use in the respective literary works from the earliest times.

The Sanskrit word *dharma*<sup>1</sup> (Pali *dhamma*) , which goes back to the Rgvedic *dharmān*<sup>2</sup> (ordinance, law ) is derived from the root *dhṛ*, which has a variety of meanings like 'hold', 'wear', 'support', 'establish', etc. The word *dharma* like its Pali counterpart *dhamma*, has been used in various contexts with meanings that often differ from one another considerably. The word also forms the base for a large number of compound nouns<sup>3</sup> which are of much religio-philosophical and ethical significance.

In this paper, it is proposed to discuss some of the prominent meanings attached to the Sanskrit word *dharma* and to make a brief survey of the important semantic developments that characterised its Japanese counterpart, *daruma*, particularly, in the later Japanese language.

The Sanskrit *dharma*, in its uncompounded form, usually has the meaning of 'law' 'doctrine' 'what is established' 'duty' 'right' and also carries a variety of other extended meanings in different contexts. The meaning of 'law' or 'doctrine' which appears to be one of the most predominant, is evident from its use to designate the doctrine of Buddhism, as distinguished from the *Buddha* and the *Sangha*, the monastic order, forming the well known three-fold refuge, the *tisarāna* in Pali. In most contexts,

1. Vide Turner, R.L., *A Comparative Dictionary of Indo-Aryan Languages*, V. p. 386;
2. Cf. *devò devī dhārmanā sīritāh sucih. Rgveda* I, 160.1. [*dhārmanā*=according to fixed law] *tāni dhārmāṇi prathamāni āsan. Rgveda* X.90.16. [*dhārmāṇi*=ordinances]
3. Vide Monier Williams, M., *A Sanskrit - English Dictionary*, p. 510 ff