Star Wars And Dharma Traditions: Opinion Essay

The Star Wars movies, television shows, books, and cartoons are loved throughout the world as Star Wars is the second most successful movie franchise of all time right behind the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Although they have been some tough spots lately with the prequels receiving backlash as well as the new trilogy receiving backlash a fanbase like Star Wars' is like no other. Due to my love for Star Wars I have begun to want to get more in depth with some of the themes of Star Wars and theorize on everything happening through the Star Wars Series. Throughout the movies, television shows, books, and cartoons you can see how the Dharma traditions have clearly worked their way into these movies in different ways which I will do my best to prove as George Lucas himself has never confirmed or denied this claim but we are all almost certain he is doing it purposefully.

Meditation is a word that is used throughout the Dharma traditions so clearly, its importance is heavy. Not only in these traditions but also in Jedi philosophy we see meditation used on a consistent basis especially by the Jedi who are designated as Jedi consular. This means that they spend a large amount of their time meditating to try to see into the future or predict certain possible outcomes of things. These consulars are incredibly close with the force as usually these consulars are people who have an already incredibly strong connection with the force. The most notable Jedi consular is Yoda as he is seen meditating many of times to try and predict the future to change or alter it to keep the peace. Meditation is used in similar ways but different in the sense that meditation used by those in Hindu, Buddhist, Sikhist, and Jains are used for personal gain not in the sense of selfishness but in the sense that they are trying to reach their end goal by using meditation as a tool to help them do so.

Karma is term that is widespread throughout the Dharma traditions and it is translated similarly throughout the traditions. Anakin Skywalker experienced the full circle of the Buddhist belief that everyone if they follow the correct path can lead to their redemption. Although Vader's redemption is short lived because he dies soon after he still experienced this. Karma was present throughout Vader's life but not throughout Luke's as better said, "To kill Vader, as Obi-Wan wants, will place Luke exactly where the Emperor desires him-at the Sith Lord's side. Either choice will produce the same result. But Luke is not controlled by destiny. He is free to choose, and his choice saves the galaxy" (Beliefnet 2016). This is Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader breaking their cycle of Karma as although Darth Vader does die soon after he in a way redeems himself.

The Jedi Order is an order that was built in hopes to keep peace throughout the galaxy as most Jedi were often referred to as peacekeepers. These peacekeepers however have shown to have a lot in common with Buddhism. A common word that you will find throughout the Jedi order as well as Buddhism is attachment. In an article called Jedi Philosophy it states, "As with most forms of Buddhism, Zen preaches "non-attachment," the letting go of emotional bonds to people, places and things" (Sunami 2015). This is important to note as if our protagonist Anakin Skywalker from the prequels had followed the rule of non-attachment the Star Wars Universe may be completely different from as we know it today. In Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith, we see attachment throughout the whole story through our protagonist Anakin Skywalker. We see it towards the middle to beginning of the movie when Anakin's mother, Shmi gets killed

by the Tuskin Raiders. After finding his mother bound up as well as dying in his arms in a pit of rage Anakin kills every Tuskin Raider in the village including women and children. Another great example of attachment and how it is shown in the movie is when Anakin joins the dark side after he is told by Emperor Palpatine that the only way to prevent his wife Padme from dying was by joining the dark side. Due to Anakin's attachment to Padme he falls for Palpatine's tricks and falls for the dark side. Avoidance of attachment is something sacred to both of these two philosophies as it is a means of focusing their attention as if you are a Buddhist you focus on reaching Nirvana whereas if you are a Jedi you focus your attention on becoming as one with the force and reaching your maximum potential.

Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace, may not be the most beloved Star Wars movie but it does have a great reference to the Buddhism. Qui Gon Jinn was one of the most notorious Jedi Consulars as he was known for his deep connection for the force as he would meditate a lot in his free time. Before his face off with Darth Maul as he got trapped in between the lasers he sat down as they got a brief break in the middle of their fighting. While he was sitting, he was clearing his mind instead of being seduced by the fear Darth Maul was trying to strike into Qui Gon's heart. You can see that beyond the meditation there is more to it than seems, "Buddhist practice is about accepting reality regardless of what it is. For many of us this means confronting frightening thoughts and mental activities that plague us" (Bortolin 2015). This is important as Qui Gon Jinn realizes that this is all he can do in hopes of striking down Darth Maul.

Yoda has some good lines throughout Star Wars that correlate very closely with the Dharma traditions. "Pass on what you have learned", is a quote that we see from Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi as this is like bodhisattva in the sense of teaching others. You could always try to reach nirvana by yourself, but it would make it easier to have someone there to guide you. "Do or do not, there is no try", is probably Yoda's most famous quote as I translate this to be referring to the fact that you can only control yourself and what happens next, if you fail you fail, if you succeed you succeed. Yoda is the without a doubt the wisest doubt throughout all the Jedi as well as he is arguably the closest to a Buddhist of any Jedi.

Hinduism is another one of the four Dharma traditions which is represented quite well throughout the Star Wars Universe. In Hinduism you can find many different gods and goddesses as one goddess shares a very close name with a very famous Jedi Knight. In Star Wars during the days of the Republic in charge of keeping peace throughout the galaxy as well as trying to run the Republic was full time work as the Jedi were always kept busy. One of my favorite Jedi Knights who managed to keep herself busy is Shaak Ti. Although she may not look like it, she is one of the most powerful of all the Jedi in the entire galaxy. Not only is she powerful but she shows incredible patience with the clones as she overlooks their training on Kamino. Like the Hindu goddess named Shakti who is the goddess of power, ability, and strength. Another famous Jedi who is named after another Hindu belief is Yoda. Yoda is named after the four Yogas. The four Yogas being the path of knowledge, the path of love, the path of work, and the path of meditation. Beyond the Jedi order we see the use of Hindu gods and goddesses' names as well. We see it in Anakin's mother Shmi Skywalker who is named after Lakshmi, who is the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity. We also can find that Padme is not named after a Hindu god but instead the Sanskrit word for lotus flower which is Padma. I find this especially interesting as there is in fact a significance of the lotus flower in Hinduism as the lotus flower stands for purity and divinity.

Self-control is another essential you must have in order to be able to release yourself from the constant cycle of suffering. In the Jedi beliefs you must have incredible self-control to use the powers bestowed upon you in a manor that is not selfish but good for the galaxy and for the innocent. Hinduism is also shown heavily in Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back, when our protagonist, Luke Skywalker, is sent to Dagobah to be trained better away from everyone and the chaos in the ways of the force. After reading an article titled Star Wars and Hinduism, I found out this, “When he first arrives, Luke finds himself in a forest, looking for the old, wise Yoda to learn the ways of the Jedi. This is very like Hindu's Janoi (Gujarati), where young males run to the forest in search of the old, wise yogi, who would provide great knowledge” (Kleinow 1997). This is incredibly similar as it even gets worse as when Yoda goes into detail and describes the force to Luke that the force is in and all around us like what Hindu’s believe about the Universe around us. Yoda says, “You must feel the force around you; here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere, yes. Even between the land and the ship”. This is the quote that really gives it away to being similar to the Hindu belief of the Universe around us as Yoda is practically saying this but dumbing it down so that it is easier for Luke to understand.

The force works in mysterious ways, a quote by the Grand Master Yoda himself. This comes quite true in many cases but one way the force works that we understand is how a Jedi can become a force ghost. We have seen Yoda, Obi Wan Kenobi, and now Luke Skywalker vanish out of thin air at the time of their deaths meaning they have become one with the force. This is incredibly like bodhisattva. Bodhisattva is when someone delays their reaching of nirvana to help others find the path of reaching nirvana as well. Now I know the end goal of being a Jedi is not to become a force ghost but as better stated, “He or she is choosing to temporarily forego a state of eternal rest and enlightenment in order to remain on the mortal plane and pass on knowledge to those who remain” (Williams 2013). So basically, to dumb it down a bit they are putting off their inevitable death to help whoever remains alive reach their destiny. This is another just incredibly similar coincidence that happened in the film which this specific detail seems very unlikely to be a coincidence though.

Throughout the entirety of the Star Wars Universe we can find plenty of different ways that George Lucas tied different events in the movie to one of the Dharma traditions. Being that George Lucas, himself believes and follows a few Hindu ideals. Behind the creativity and originality that Star Wars is there are a lot of amazing and interesting ideals that we can see after looking back at them just a little bit more in depth. Whether George Lucas truly meant to put this many ideals from the Dharma traditions in is not known for certain as it does seem to be a lot, however. An incredible amount of thought and detail goes into this scriptwriting to make sure that these movies flow perfectly well together as they have got to be perfect. These Dharma ideals that were probably purposefully used do make the Star Wars in my opinion really make the story line of Star Wars amazing as it adds a bit of philosophy behind the beautiful chaos, storyline, and creativity that makes Star Wars one, if not the most, beloved film franchise in history.