

Purushartha (पुरुषार्थ)

By

Dr. Subhash Chandra

Puruṣārtha literally means an "object of human pursuit". It is a key concept in Hinduism, and refers to the four proper goals or aims of a human life. The four puruṣārthas are Dharma (righteousness, moral values), Artha (prosperity, economic values), Kama (pleasure, love, psychological values) and Moksha (liberation, spiritual values). All four Purusarthas are important, but in cases of conflict, Dharma is considered more important than Artha or Kama in Hindu philosophy. Moksha is considered the ultimate ideal of human life. At the same time, this is not a consensus among all Hindus, and many have different interpretations of the hierarchy, and even as to whether one should exist.

Historical Indian scholars recognized and debated the inherent tension between active pursuit of wealth (Artha purusartha) and pleasure (Kama), and renunciation of all wealth and pleasure for the sake of spiritual liberation (Moksha). They proposed "action with renunciation" or "craving-free, dharma-driven action", also called Nishkam Karma as a possible solution to the tension.

Puruṣārtha is a composite Sanskrit word from Purusha and Artha. Purusha means "human being", "soul" as well as "universal principle and soul of the universe". Artha in one context means "purpose", "object of desire" and "meaning". Together, Purusartha literally means "purpose of human being" or "object of human pursuit". Alf Hiltebeitel translates Purusartha as "Goals of Man". Prasad clarifies that "Man" includes both man and woman in ancient and medieval Indian texts. Olivelle translates it as the "aims of human life". Purusartha is also referred to as Caturvarga.

The concept of moksha developed only in the Upanishads, while the early Vedas treating the goals of human life commonly refer to kāma, artha and dharma as the "trivarga" or "three categories" of possible human pursuits. The Dharmaśāstras and the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are the first known sources that comprehensively present the notion that integrated living entails the pursuit of four goals or ends. Prasad (2008) states that the division between the trivarga and mokṣa is intended to highlight the context between the social (trivarga) and personal (mokṣa) spheres. The Sannyasa is entirely focussed on the pursuit of Moksha without violating Dharma.

Baudhāyana also makes repeated references to the Sannyasa (ascetic) stage and its behavioral focus, such as in verses II.13.7 and 11.18.13. This reference, Olivelle states, is found in many early to mid 1st millennium BC texts, and is clearly from gnomic poetry about an established ascetic tradition by the time Baudhayana Dharmasutra and other texts were written. Katha Upanishad, in hymns 2.1–2.2 contrasts the human feeling of pleasant (preyas, प्रेयस्) with that of bliss (sreyas, श्रेयस्), praising the latter. The hymns of Rig Veda in Book 10 Chapter 136, mention Muni (मुनि, monks, mendicants, holy man), with characteristics that mirror those found in

later concepts of renunciation-practising, Moksha-motivated ascetics (Sannyasins and Sannyasinis). These Muni are said to be Kesins (केशिन, long haired) wearing Mala clothes (मल, dirty, soil-colored, yellow, orange, saffron) and engaged in the affairs of Mananat (mind, meditation).

Gautama, Apastamba, Baudhayana and Vāsiṣṭha) and Dharma-sastras particularly Manusmṛti, Yājñavalkya Smṛti, Nārada-smṛti and Viṣṇu-smṛti, Arthashastra, Brihaspati Sutra, Kamasutra etc are the key text which discusses about the purushartha.

1. *Dharma*

Dharma is a key concept with multiple meanings in Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and others. There is no single-word translation for dharma in Western languages. In Hinduism, dharma signifies behaviors that are considered to be in accord with Ṛta, the order that makes life and universe possible, and includes duties, rights, laws, conduct, virtues and "right way of living". In Buddhism, dharma means "cosmic law and order" and is also applied to the teachings of the Buddha. In Buddhist philosophy, dhamma/dharma is also the term for "phenomena". Dharma in Jainism refers to the teachings of tirthankara and the body of doctrine pertaining to the purification and moral transformation of human beings. For Sikhs, the word dharm means the path of righteousness and proper religious practice.

The word dharma was already in use in the historical Vedic religion, and its meaning and conceptual scope has evolved over several millennia. The antonym of dharma is adharma. The Classical Sanskrit noun dharma or the Prakrit Dhamma are a derivation from the root dhṛ, which means "to hold, maintain, keep", and takes the meaning of "what is established or firm", and hence "law". It is derived from an older Vedic Sanskrit n-stem dharman-, with a literal meaning of "bearer, supporter", in a religious sense conceived as an aspect of Rta. In the Rigveda, the word appears as an n-stem, dhárman-, with a range of meanings encompassing "something established or firm" (in the literal sense of prods or poles).

Dharma is a concept of central importance in Indian philosophy and religion. It has multiple meanings in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. It is difficult to provide a single concise definition for dharma, as the word has a long and varied history and straddles a complex set of meanings and interpretations. There is no equivalent single-word synonym for dharma in western languages.

There have been numerous, conflicting attempts to translate ancient Sanskrit literature with the word dharma into German, English and French. The concept, claims Paul Horsch, has caused exceptional difficulties for modern commentators and translators. For example, while Grassmann's translation of Rig-veda identifies seven different meanings of dharma, Karl Friedrich Geldner in his translation of the Rig-veda employs 20 different translations for dharma, including meanings such as "law", "order", "duty", "custom", "quality", and "model", among others. However, the word dharma has become a widely accepted loanword in English, and is included in all modern unabridged English dictionaries.

The root of the word dharma is "dhri", which means "to support, hold, or bear". It is the thing that regulates the course of change by not participating in change, but that principle which remains constant. Monier-Williams, the widely cited resource for definitions and explanation of Sanskrit words and concepts of Hinduism, offers numerous definitions of the word dharma, such as that which is established or firm, steadfast decree, statute, law, practice, custom, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, ethics, religion, religious merit, good works, nature, character, quality, property. Yet, each of these definitions is incomplete, while the combination of these translations does not convey the total sense of the word. In common parlance, dharma means "right way of living" and "path of rightness".

The meaning of the word dharma depends on the context, and its meaning has evolved as ideas of Hinduism have developed through history. In the earliest texts and ancient myths of Hinduism, dharma meant cosmic law, the rules that created the universe from chaos, as well as rituals; in later Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and the Epics, the meaning became refined, richer, and more complex, and the word was applied to diverse contexts. In certain contexts, dharma designates human behaviours considered necessary for order of things in the universe, principles that prevent chaos, behaviours and action necessary to all life in nature, society, family as well as at the individual level. Dharma encompasses ideas such as duty, rights, character, vocation, religion, customs and all behaviour considered appropriate, correct or morally upright.

The antonym of dharma is adharma meaning that which is "not dharma". As with dharma, the word adharma includes and implies many ideas; in common parlance, adharma means that which is against nature, immoral, unethical, wrong or unlawful. In Buddhism, dharma incorporates the teachings and doctrines of the founder of Buddhism, the Buddha.

Some texts of Hinduism outline dharma for society and at the individual level. Of these, the most cited one is Manusmriti, which describes the four Varnas, their rights and duties. Most texts of Hinduism, however, discuss dharma with no mention of Varna (caste). Other dharma texts and Smritis differ from Manusmriti on the nature and structure of Varnas. Yet, other texts question the very existence of varna. Bhṛigu, in the Epics, for example, presents the theory that dharma does not require any varnas. In practice, medieval India is widely believed to be a socially stratified society, with each social strata inheriting a profession and being endogamous. Varna was not absolute in Hindu dharma; individuals had the right to renounce and leave their Varna, as well as their āśramas of life, in search of mokṣa. While neither Manusmriti nor succeeding Smritis of Hinduism ever use the word varnadharma (that is, the dharma of varnas), or varnasramadharmā (that is, the dharma of varnas and āśramas), the scholarly commentary on Manusmriti use these words, and thus associate dharma with varna system of India. In 6th century India, even Buddhist kings called themselves "protectors of varnasramadharmā" – that is, dharma of varna and āśramas of life.

At the individual level, some texts of Hinduism outline four āśramas, or stages of life as individual's dharma. These are: (1) brahmācārya, the life of preparation as a student, (2) gṛhastha, the life of the householder with family and other social roles, (3) vānprastha or aranyaka, the life of the forest-dweller, transitioning from worldly occupations to reflection and renunciation, and

(4) sannyāsa, the life of giving away all property, becoming a recluse and devotion to moksa, spiritual matters.

The four stages of life complete the four human strivings in life, according to Hinduism. Dharma enables the individual to satisfy the striving for stability and order, a life that is lawful and harmonious, the striving to do the right thing, be good, be virtuous, earn religious merit, be helpful to others, interact successfully with society. The other three strivings are Artha – the striving for means of life such as food, shelter, power, security, material wealth, etc.; Kama – the striving for sex, desire, pleasure, love, emotional fulfillment, etc.; and Moksa – the striving for spiritual meaning, liberation from life-rebirth cycle, self-realisation in this life, etc. The four stages are neither independent nor exclusionary in Hindu dharma.

2. Artha

Artha is one of the four aims of human life in Indian philosophy. The word artha literally translates as "meaning, sense, goal, purpose or essence" depending on the context. Artha is also a broader concept in the scriptures of Hinduism. As a concept, it has multiple meanings, all of which imply "means of life", activities and resources that enable one to be in a state one wants to be in. Artha applies to both an individual and a government. In an individual's context, artha includes wealth, career, activity to make a living, financial security and economic prosperity. The proper pursuit of artha is considered an important aim of human life in Hinduism. At government level, artha includes social, legal, economic and worldly affairs. Proper Arthashastra is considered an important and necessary objective of government.

In Hindu traditions, Artha is connected to the three other aspects and goals of human life: Dharma (virtuous, proper, moral life), Kama (pleasure, sensuality, emotional fulfillment) and Moksha (liberation, release, self-actualization). Together, these mutually non-exclusive four aims of life are called Puruṣārtha.

Artha as a concept includes multiple meanings. It is difficult to capture the meaning of artha, or related terms of dharma, kama and moksha, each in a single English word. John Lochtefeld describes artha as the means of life, and includes material prosperity. Karl Potter explains it as an attitude and capability that enables one to make a living, to remain alive, to thrive as a free person. It includes economic prosperity, security and health of oneself and those one feels responsible for. Artha includes everything in one's environment that allows one to live. It is neither an end state nor an endless goal of aimlessly amassing money, claims Karl Potter rather it is an attitude and necessary requirement of human life. John Koller takes a different viewpoint than Karl Potter's interpretation. John Koller suggests artha is not an attitude, rather it is one of the necessities of human life. A central premise of Hindu philosophy, claims Koller, is that every person should live a joyous and pleasurable life, that such fulfilling life requires every person's needs and desires be acknowledged and fulfilled, that needs can only be satisfied through activity and when sufficient means for those activities are available. Artha, then, is best described as pursuit of activities and means necessary for a joyous and pleasurable life.

Daya Krishna argues that artha, as well as the concept of Puruṣārthas, is a myth. The various schools and ancient Sanskrit texts provide no consensus opinion, notes Krishna, rather

they present a debate, a diversity of views on what artha and Puruṣārtha means. Inconsistencies and conflicting verses are even present within the same script, such as the Manusmṛiti. Some ancient Indian texts suggest artha are instruments that enable satisfaction of desires; some include wealth, some include power, and some such as the bhakti schools include instruments to love God. Some of this, suggests Krishna, reflects differences in human needs. Perhaps, conjectures Krishna, artha is just a subset of kama and karma.

Vatsyayana in Kama Sutra defines artha as the acquisition of arts, land, cattle, wealth, equipages and friends. He explains, artha is also protection of what is already acquired, and the increase of what is protected.

Gavin Flood explains artha as "worldly success" without violating dharma (moral responsibility), kama (love) and one's journey towards moksha (spiritual liberation). Flood clarifies that artha in ancient Hindu literature, as well as purushartha, is better understood as a goal of Man (not a man). In other words, it is one of the four purposes of human life. The survival and the thriving of humans requires artha - that is, economic activity, wealth and its creation, worldly success, profit, political success and all that is necessary for human existence.

The word Artha appears in the oldest known scriptures of India. However, the term connotes 'purpose', goal or 'aim' of something, often as purpose of ritual sacrifices. Over time, artha evolves into a broader concept in the Upanishadic era. It is first included as part of Trivarga concept (three categories of human life - dharma, artha and kama), which over time expanded into the concept Caturvarga (four categories, including moksha). Caturvarga is also referred to as Puruṣārtha.

The Mimamsa school of Hinduism explained artha, dharma and kama by contrasting Puruṣārtha and Kratvartha. Puruṣārtha is human purpose of a yajna, while Kratvartha is sacrificial purpose of a yajna. They recognized and explained all human actions have two effects: first, every act affects itself regardless of actors involved; second, every act has human meanings, hopes and desires and affects each actor in a personal way. Jaimini explained in 3rd century BC, that this human meaning cannot be separated from the human goal. The phala (fruit, result) of a sacrifice is implicit in the artha (meaning, purpose) of the sacrifice. Mimamsa school then argued that man is for the purpose of actions demanded by Vedic injunctions (apauruseya), and such subordination of man to rituals allows man to reach heaven. Other schools of Hinduism, such as Yoga and Vedanta schools, disagreed with Mimamsa school. They argued that rituals and sacrifice are means, not ends. Their emphasis shifted from rituals to effort and knowledge, from heaven to moksha, from freedom after life to freedom in this life, from human being as a cog in cosmic wheel to human being as an end in himself.

Thereafter came a flowering of the Shastraic literature on Artha and other aims of human beings: of dharma in Dharmashastras, of artha in Arthashastras, of kama in Kamashastras (Kamasutra being one part of the compendium). Different schools of Hinduism offer different perspectives on artha, just like dharma, karma and moksha. Most historical literature of ancient India from about 5th century BC and after, interlaces all four aims of humans. Many Upanishads as well as the two Indian Epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - discuss and use the words

dharmā, arthā, kama and moksha as part of their respective themes. Even subhasitas, gnomic and didactic Indian literature from 1st and 2nd millennium CE, incorporate arthā and other three aims of human life.

3. *Kama*

Kama means "desire, wish, longing" in Hindu and Buddhist literature. Kama often connotes sexual desire and longing in contemporary literature, but the concept more broadly refers to any desire, wish, passion, longing, pleasure of the senses, desire for, longing to and after, the aesthetic enjoyment of life, affection, or love, enjoyment of love is particularly with or without enjoyment of sexual, sensual and erotic desire, and may be without sexual connotations.

Kama is one of the four goals of human life in Hindu traditions. It is considered an essential and healthy goal of human life when pursued without sacrificing the other three goals: Dharma (virtuous, proper, moral life), Arthā (material prosperity, income security, means of life) and Moksha (liberation, release, self-actualization). Together, these four aims of life are called Puruṣārthā.

Kama means "desire, wish or longing". In contemporary literature, kama refers usually to sexual desire. However, the term also refers to any sensory enjoyment, emotional attraction and aesthetic pleasure such as from arts, dance, music, painting, sculpture and nature. The concept kama is found in some of the earliest known verses in the Vedas. For example, Book 10 of the Rig Veda describes the creation of the universe from nothing by the great heat. The Brhadāranyaka Upanishad, one of the oldest Upanishads of Hinduism, uses the term kama, also in a broader sense, to refer to any desire.

Ancient Indian literature such as the Epics, which followed the Upanishads, develop and explain the concept of kama together with Arthā and Dharma. The Mahābhārata, for example, provides one of the expansive definitions of kama. The Epic claims kama to be any agreeable and desirable experience (pleasure) generated by the interaction of one or more of the five senses with anything congenial to that sense and while the mind is concurrently in harmony with the other goals of human life (dharmā, arthā and moksha).

Kama often implies the short form of the word kamana (desire, appetite or appetite). Kama, however, is more than kamana. Kama is an experience that includes the discovery of an object, learning about the object, emotional connection, the process of enjoyment and the resulting feeling of well-being before, during, and after the experience.

Vatsyāyana, the author of the Kamasutra, describes kama as happiness that is a manasa vyapara (phenomenon of the mind). Just like the Mahābhārata, Vatsyāyana's Kamasutra defines kama as pleasure an individual experiences from the world, with one or more senses: hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and feeling—in harmony with one's mind and soul. Experiencing harmonious music is kama, as is being inspired by natural beauty, the aesthetic appreciation of a work of art, and admiring with joy something created by another human being. Kama Sutra, in its discourse on kama, describes many forms of art, dance, and music, along with sex, as the means to pleasure and enjoyment. Pleasure enhances ourself appreciation of incense, candle's,

music, scented oil, yoga stretching and meditation, and the experience of the heart chakra. Negativity, doubt and hesitation blocks the heart chakra, openness is impaired while attached to desires. Kamala in the heart chakra, is considered to be a seat of devotional worship. Opening the heart chakra is awareness of a divine communion and joy for communion with deities and the self (atman).

John Lochtefeld explains kama as desire, noting that it often refers to sexual desire in contemporary literature, but in ancient Indian literature kāma includes any kind of attraction and pleasure such as those deriving from the arts. Karl Potter describes kama as an attitude and capacity. A little girl who hugs her teddy bear with a smile is experiencing kama, as are two lovers in embrace. During these experiences, the person connects and identifies the beloved as part of oneself and feels more complete, fulfilled, and whole by experiencing that connection and nearness. This, in the Indian perspective, is kāma. Hindery notes the inconsistent and diverse expositions of kama in various ancient texts of India. Some texts, such as the Epic Ramayana, paint kama through the desire of Rama for Sita a desire that transcends the physical and marital into a love that is spiritual, and something that gives Rama his meaning of life, his reason to live. Sita and Rama both frequently express their unwillingness and inability to live without the other. This romantic and spiritual view of kama in the Ramayana by Valmiki is quite different, claim Hindery and others, than the normative and dry description of kama in the law codes of smṛiti by Manu for example.

Gavin Flood explains kama as "love" without violating dharma (moral responsibility), artha (material prosperity) and one's journey towards moksha (spiritual liberation).

4. Moksha

Moksha, also called vimoksha, vimukti and mukti is a term in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism which refers to various forms of emancipation, enlightenment, liberation, and release. In its soteriological and eschatological senses, it refers to freedom from saṃsāra, the cycle of death and rebirth. In its epistemological and psychological senses, moksha refers to freedom from ignorance: self-realization, self-actualization and self-knowledge. In Hindu traditions, moksha is a central concept and the utmost aim to be attained through three paths during human life; these three paths are dharma (virtuous, proper, moral life), artha (material prosperity, income security, means of life), and kama (pleasure, sensuality, emotional fulfillment). Together, these four concepts are called Puruṣārtha in Hinduism.

In some schools of Indian religions, moksha is considered equivalent to and used interchangeably with other terms such as vimoksha, vimukti, kaivalya, apavarga, mukti, nihsreyasa and nirvana. However, terms such as moksha and nirvana differ and mean different states between various schools of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The term nirvana is more common in Buddhism, while moksha is more prevalent in Hinduism.

The definition and meaning of moksha varies between various schools of Indian religions. Moksha means freedom, liberation; from what and how is where the schools differ.

Moksha is also a concept that means liberation from rebirth or saṃsāra. This liberation can be attained while one is on earth (jivanmukti), or eschatologically (karmamukti, videhamukti). Some Indian traditions have emphasized liberation on concrete, ethical action within the world. This liberation is an epistemological transformation that permits one to see the truth and reality behind the fog of ignorance.

Moksha has been defined not merely as absence of suffering and release from bondage to saṃsāra, various schools of Hinduism also explain the concept as presence of the state of paripurna-brahmanubhava (the experience of oneness with Brahman, the One Supreme Self), a state of knowledge, peace and bliss.

The concept of moksha appears much later in ancient Indian literature than the concept of dharma. The proto-concept that first appears in the ancient Sanskrit verses and early Upanishads is mucyate, which means freed or released. It is the middle and later Upanishads, such as the Svetasvatara and Maitri, where the word moksha appears and begins becoming an important concept.

Kathaka Upanishad, a middle Upanishadic era script dated to be about 2500 years old, is among the earliest expositions about saṃsāra and moksha. In Book I, Section III, the legend of boy Naciketa queries Yama, the lord of death to explain what causes saṃsāra and what leads to liberation. Naciketa inquires: what causes sorrow? Yama explains that suffering and saṃsāra results from a life that is lived absent-mindedly, with impurity, with neither the use of intelligence nor self-examination, where neither mind nor senses are guided by one's atma (soul, self). Liberation comes from a life lived with inner purity, alert mind, led by buddhi (reason, intelligence), realization of the Supreme Self (purusha) who dwells in all beings. Kathaka Upanishad asserts knowledge liberates, knowledge is freedom. Kathaka Upanishad also explains the role of yoga in personal liberation, moksha.

Svetasvatara Upanishad, another middle era Upanishad written after Kathaka Upanishad, begins with questions such as why is man born, what is the primal cause behind the universe, what causes joy and sorrow in life? It then examines the various theories, that were then existing, about saṃsāra and release from bondage. Svetasvatara claims bondage results from ignorance, illusion or delusion; deliverance comes from knowledge. The Supreme Being dwells in every being, he is the primal cause, he is the eternal law, he is the essence of everything, he is nature, he is not a separate entity. Liberation comes to those who know Supreme Being is present as the Universal Spirit and Principle, just as they know butter is present in milk. Such realization, claims Svetasvatara, come from self-knowledge and self-discipline; and this knowledge and realization is liberation from transmigration, the final goal of the Upanishad.

In myths and temples of India and Bali Indonesia, Sarasvati appears with swan. Sarasvati is the Hindu goddess of knowledge, learning and creative arts, while swan is a symbol of

spiritual perfection, liberation and moksha. The symbolism of Sarasvati and the swan is that knowledge and moksha go together.

Starting with the middle Upanishad era, moksha - or equivalent terms such as mukti and kaivalya - is a major theme in many Upanishads. For example, Sarasvati Rahasya Upanishad, one of several Upanishads of the bhakti school of Hinduism, starts out with prayers to Goddess Sarasvati. She is the Hindu goddess of knowledge, learning and creative arts; her name is a compound word of “sara” and “sva”, meaning "essence of self". After the prayer verses, the Upanishad inquires about the secret to freedom and liberation (mukti).