

# Revisiting the Classical Indian Concept of Purusarthas and exploring its relevance for the Reconstruction of Contemporary Society

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## Abstract

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The classical Indian doctrine of the **Puruṣārthas** — Dharma (ethical order), Artha (material prosperity), Kāma (desire and emotional fulfillment), and Mokṣa (spiritual liberation) — presents a holistic framework for understanding human life and social organization. This paper revisits the philosophical foundations of the Puruṣārtha system and examines its relevance in addressing the moral, social, economic, and psychological crises of contemporary society. Modern development models often privilege material growth and sensory gratification while neglecting ethical responsibility and inner well-being, resulting in imbalance, inequality, and existential anxiety. The Puruṣārtha framework offers an integrative alternative in which ethical discipline regulates economic pursuits, desires are refined through cultural and emotional maturity, and spiritual awareness provides ultimate meaning to human existence. By harmonizing individual aspirations with social welfare and moral order, the doctrine can contribute to reconstructing a value-based, sustainable, and humane social structure. The study argues that the Puruṣārthas are not merely ancient ideals but a living philosophical resource capable of guiding modern education, governance, economic life, and personal development toward balanced and responsible progress.

**Keywords-** Puruṣārthas, Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Mokṣa, Indian Philosophy, Social Reconstruction, Ethical Development, Holistic Human Life, Value-Based Society

## Introduction:

Indian culture is broadly presented to the Western world, as well as to the English speaking modern generation as spiritualistic in nature. It is believed that this tradition prompts man to be otherworldly a social, and a recluse. But this is a sheer

distortion of truth. Let us look at one of the mantras of the Veda. This will give us some idea about the healthy attitude of our ancient seers. Yajur Veda says: - "May we have the power of mission for hundred years, may we live for hundred years, may we have the power of hearing for hundred years. May we not depend on anyone else for hundred years".

Can we call this an exposition of other worldliness and unalloyed spiritualism? An unbiased study of our ancient scriptures shows that the great seers of India conceived man as a totality of body, mind, intellect, heart and soul. This holistic conception of man finds its fullest expression in the theory of *puruṣārthas*.

Etymologically speaking '*puruṣārtha*' is a combination of two words *puruṣa* and *artha*. *Puruṣa* means a person, a rational and conscious agent. *Artha* means goal or object that which is aimed at or desired. So broadly speaking *puruṣārtha* stands for the objectives, values, or goals that a conscious agent seeks for. In thinking, acting and judging, a person does two things - he knows the world as it is (facts); at the same time, he evaluates things as good or bad, beautiful or ugly. In the latter case he applies his rationality for evaluation. Valuation is connected with what one desires. But what one desires is not always to be sought. We in human life adopt some norms by which we determine that which is desirable and that which is indescribable.

Being a rational agent, man must seek that which is desirable, *Puruṣārtha* in this sense means the values or goals that ought to be desired. Besides *puruṣārtha* as value should not be taken as person-specific. No value in true sense can be so. Man being a social animal needs a harmonious and well-balanced life in society. It should strike a balance among the physical, psychic, moral and spiritual. The theory of *puruṣārtha* aims at providing a guide-line that ensures such a balance for a man in his personal as well as social life.

Let us now come to the theory of *puruṣārthas*. It is believed that initially our tradition enlightened a threefold theory of value i.e, *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kama*. Later on a fourth value i.e *Mokṣa* was added to it. Thus four-fold value is being prescribed for man for a healthy and fulfilling life. *Artha* stands for the physical and material value, *Kama* for psychic value, *Dharma* for moral value and *Mokṣa* for spiritual value. In my paper, I aim to examine two aspects of the theory. I shall discuss in brief what these values individually imply and then I shall try to examine how they are connected with one another. The concept of the purpose or goal of life is termed *Puruṣārtha* in Hindu scriptures. The word *Puruṣārtha* is a combination of two terms: *puruṣa*, meaning self, and *artha*, meaning objective or purpose. Hindu scriptures have long advocated four primary *Puruṣārthas*: *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, and *Mokṣa*.

The first goal is *Dharma*, which has been interpreted in many ways, such as duty, faith, righteousness, religion, justice, morality, and ethics. The second goal is *Artha*, which refers to material wealth. Hinduism recognizes that material wealth is essential for an individual's overall happiness and well-being. *Kāma*, though

often associated with sexual desire, broadly refers to all forms of sensory pleasure and enjoyment. The final goal of human life is *Moksha*, or self-realization, which is the ultimate liberation from suffering.

In the modern world, society advances through technological progress, often overlooking the deeper purpose of life. The traditional understanding of *Puruṣārtha* in texts like the *Mahābhārata* has evolved and changed in its real-world application. The true essence of the *Puruṣārthas* has become somewhat diluted today.

### **Dharma:**

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Among the *purusarthas*, *dharma* is the most important one. It possesses several meanings like virtue, righteousness, duty, order, justice, morality, religion, eternal law etc. It is derived from the root ‘*dhr*’ meaning to uphold, to sustain or to nourish. *Dharma* is used in the sense of ‘upholder, supporter and sustainer’ in the *Rg Veda*. It contains all the principles required to sustain and uphold human existence in its fullness and integrity. According to the *Mahabharata*, ‘*dharanadharmā iti*’ which means that which controls is dharma. According to the *Atharva Veda*, ‘*prītvīm dharmena dhritam*’ meaning that which upholds the world is *dharma*. Hiriyanna thinks of *dharma* partly as a religious concept but predominantly as a moral concept.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, it predominantly designates socio-moral duties and character values that are required for the psycho-social existence. *Dharma* is also said to be a distinguishing characteristic of man. Man like other animals is not satisfied with mere survival, with mere physical pleasures. These needs are imperative in human life as he is an animal. But man is more than an animal. He is not satisfied with the gratification of physiological needs only. The *Hitopadesa* says, “*Ahara nidra bhaya maithunam ca samanyametat pashubhirnaranam/ Dharmo hi tesam adhiko viseso dharmena hina pasubhih samana.//*” Hunger, sleep, fear and sexual desire are the instincts which are common between mankind and beasts. It is especially dharma that mankind possesses additionally, and a person bereft of dharma is like a beast.

*Dharma* aims at giving man a sense of identity and responsibility and asks him to enjoy the world and pursue secular goals in accordance with *dharma*. *Dharma* controls all relationships and inspires man to rise, to expand his personality and dignify the world. Dharma as a moral value has been acknowledged as a principle which maintains the stability of the society. Manu recommends the fourfold division of the span of life (*asrama*) with *dharma* as the basis of each stage.

*Dharma* is said to regulate the life of the individual at every stage. *Asramadhharma* is consistent with the natural functions of the individual. It aims to realize all the values of human life and to have a wholesome life. The first stage of life is *brahmacaryasrama* which consists of the first twenty-five years of an individual's life. The *brahmacari* or the student tries to seek knowledge of the *Brahman*. *Brahman* has several meanings like the Ultimate Reality, the *Veda* or knowledge. To study is his sacred duty or *tapa*. The *brahmacari* studies in *tapovanas* or forest academies run by great teachers. The students are absorbed in the pursuit of knowledge and try to cultivate the character traits like truthfulness, gratitude, honesty, self-respect, respect for others, self-control, sense of duty etc. avoiding luxury and pleasures. The student has to study by his personal endeavour (*srama*). The *Yajur Veda* says, "*siksayai prasninam upaiksaya abhiprasninam.*"<sup>2</sup> which means one must be a questioner in order to learn. The student also learns the lessons of social life as he studies with other students.

The second stage is *grhasthasrama*. The *grhastha* or the householder enjoys the worldly life and the pleasures of the world like wealth, procreation, etc. But the householder in order to lead a happy and virtuous life has to practice benevolence and generosity. Acquisition and expenditure of wealth has to be in accordance with moral values. The householder has to be aware of his social obligations and responsibilities. He has three *rna's* or obligations, namely, *risi rna's*, the obligations he owes to the *risis*, *pitr rna's*, the obligations he owes to his ancestors, *deva rna's*, obligations he owes to divine powers. He fulfils these obligations by studying, teaching and advancing knowledge, by begetting children, and by following various religious practices respectively.

*Vanaprashtha* which literally means giving up the worldly life represents the third stage. The *Vanaprasthin* has to gradually withdraw himself from the pleasures of the world and hand over the family responsibilities to the next generation. After crossing the age of fifty, he spends major chunk of his time uplifting other people and improving their lives. He becomes a universal man who has developed the feeling of oneness with the whole universe. According to S.G.Nigal, "*Vanaprashtha* is a gradual evolution of a 'family man' to a 'society man', from one seeking personal gain to one seeking a better world and the welfare of his community"<sup>3</sup>.

*Sanyasa* is the stage of renunciation in later years of a person's life which is marked by the renunciation of worldly and materialistic desires, nonviolence, peaceful and simple life and spiritual pursuit. They are known as *bhiksu* (a beggar), *yati* (a spiritual person), *sraman* (an ascetic), *parivrajaka* (a wanderer). The goal of a *sanyasi* is *moksa* or liberation. The *Rig Veda* mentions, *sanyasi* or *muni* (one who observes silence) as those with *kesin* (long haired) and *mala* (soil coloured) clothes, engaged in the affairs of *mananat* (mind or meditation).<sup>4</sup>

*Dharma* not only constitutes the basis of the fourfold division of the life of the individual (*asrama*) but also the fourfold classification of society (*caturvarnam*). *Dharma* as a moral duty has been highly acclaimed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, whose

motto is duty for the sake of duty (*niskama karma*). A set of duties or *dharma*s are prescribed for everyone as a member of the *varna* he belongs to, be it a *brahmana*, a *ksatriya*, a *vaisya* or a *sudra*. The *Bhagavad Gita* considers these four *varnas* being based on *gunas* (*guna vibhagasah*) and *karmas* (*Karma vibhagasah*). In every individual there exist three *gunas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. The dominance of a *guna* differs from one individual to the other. The *gunas* determine the nature of an individual and the nature determines the duty of an individual. The nature of a *sattva*- dominated *brahmana* is self-control, purity, knowledge and wisdom. His duty is to impart knowledge and wisdom. The nature of the *rajas*-dominated *ksatriya* is heroism and boldness. His duty is to fight and protect. The nature of the *rajas*- dominated *vaisya* is industriousness and his duty is farming, trade etc. The duty of the *tamas*- dominated *sudra* is to do anything which is of the nature of service to any of the other three classes. Here *dharma* or duty is natural (*svabhabajam*).

The *Bhagavad Gita* makes a distinction between *svadharma* (one's own duty) and *paradharma* (another man's duty). Lord *Krsna* goes to the length of saying that once own defectively performed duty is more meritorious than the well performed duty of another man. The Lord exhorts Arjuna never to give up his *svadharma* which is *sahaja* (natural). The *Bhagavad Gita* can be quoted saying, "*svadharme nidhanam sreyah, paradharmo bhayabhayah*"<sup>5</sup> which means it is better to die while performing one's own duty than to remain alive while performing the duty of another.

In today's fast-paced, mechanized lifestyle, people often neglect the principles of *dharma*—failing to understand and live by it—just as they disregard Nature, Culture, and Art. This neglect has become the root cause of many modern issues and human suffering. *Dharma* is not an outdated religious tradition or a blind belief tied to caste, as some might misconstrue. Instead, it is a profound truth: those who live in accordance with *dharma* seldom encounter failure in life.

A person who adheres to *dharma* gains self-awareness, understands their innate nature, nurtures it through education and training, performs their duties to the best of their ability, and pursues ambitious goals. Such a life, aligned with *dharma*, is often marked by fulfillment and worldly success. The proper interpretation and application of *dharma* are essential to understanding and appreciating Indian philosophical traditions in their entirety.

Modern technological advancements, while contributing significantly to material prosperity, have simultaneously eroded moral and ethical values, leading to various individual, social, and religious crises. In an era where secularism and freedom are celebrated and religion is frequently sidelined, the traditional concept of *dharma* emerges as a dynamic force capable of reinstating a robust value system.

*Dharma*, in this broader sense, embodies the living spirit of globalization. As highlighted in the great epic *Mahābhārata*, *dharma* serves as the binding force that unites humanity. It represents the universal order and the moral code that governs

human interactions. When applied effectively, *dharma* shapes the human experience, fostering universal peace and harmony as its ultimate rewards.

### **Artha:**

The next aim of human life is *artha*. *Artha* as *purusartha* includes all the means which satisfy human desires. It includes the pursuit of material well-being, wealth and power and is essential for survival. *Artha* as an economic value is at the root of both social good and pleasure. It brings social harmony, stability and justice. It is the basis of all values and is responsible for the well-being of the individual and society. The individual cannot be expected to be virtuous unless his basic needs are fulfilled. In the *Rig Veda* there are various hymns addressed to Gods for granting wealth. In the *Mahabhrata*, there are many stanzas glorifying wealth. In the *Shanti Parva*, the importance of wealth is stressed thus; “poverty is a state of shamefulness”. All kinds of meritorious acts flow from the possession of great wealth, from wealth spring all religious acts, all pleasures and heaven itself”<sup>6</sup>. The famous law maker Manu has advised people to save for the future. He has also advised the ladies to avoid spending at their sweet will. “*sada prahrstaya bhavyam grhakaryesu daksaya, susamskrtopaskaraya vyaye camuktahastaya*”<sup>7</sup> which means expected from women is their being cheerful, cultured with household skills and prudent with expenses. *Artha* as a value brings moral control and makes the society free from corruption.

*Artha* means object, desire for something, meaning as referring to some object and also possessions, like the attainment of prosperity, advantage, profit and wealth. *Artha* as a value refers of the last sense of the meaning. Kautilya in his *Arthaśāstra* says "that which promotes life and that which is conducive to the maintenance of life is artha". (1.111.5) Elaborating this Kautilya further says that it is a form of human activity, motivation and desire.

So, *artha* should not be taken in the sense of wealth alone. Human beings need, certain material conditions to be fulfilled for leading a healthy life. So there must be prosperity in the society. Therefore, Kautilya says that poverty is a state of sinfulness. In *Mahābhārata* it is stated that a hungry man can commit all sorts of sins. So a morally prosperous society also needs an economic stability. At the same time our tradition emphasizes that material wealth should be desired in moderation. It is primarily meant for one's own fulfillment as well as of others. *Bhagavat Gitā* very specifically says, one, who enjoys something from others without giving anything in return, is a thief. (111.12). Similarly, *Isopanisad* instructs do not covet other's wealth. Thus wealth and material prosperity should be kept within the bounds of one's own need. It should not lead to disvalue. (*anartha*). In *Athasastra*, *artha* is also therefore defined as that which helps one to lead a meaningful life (*arthavan*) and that which destroys or disturbing is called *anartha*. *Samkarachaya* therefore cautious that *artha* can lead to *anartha*. Kautilya in his *Arthaśāstra* specifically states that wealth should be used in moderation and it should be spent for the maintenance of life and society. Yajnavalkya in *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*

very succinctly sums up the philosophy of material prosperity-

"Wealth is dear but it is dear for the self only". Here self means the maintenance of life and spirit."

In the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya the term *artha* has numerous interpretations which include material well-being of the people and the state, economy and livelihood of the people, economic efficiency of the state in all field of activity, politics, the management of the state. *Artha* here is an art of governance. In the *Arthashastra*, Kautilya says," The source of livelihood of the people is wealth. Here the wealth of the nation is both the territory of the state and the inhabitants who follow a variety of occupations" <sup>8</sup>.

Ancient Indian literature holds a positive perspective on wealth, but *artha* (material wealth) is never considered in isolation from social obligations and responsibilities. It is inherently a social value. While wealth is essential, its pursuit solely for selfish purposes can negatively impact a person's character. The *Katha Upanishad* teaches, "*na vittena tarpaniyo manusyah*," emphasizing that material wealth alone cannot fully satisfy human desires. Similarly, the *Isa Upanishad* asserts in the famous verse, "*tena tyaktena bhunjitah*," urging individuals to enjoy wealth with detachment and moderation.

Vedic sages never condemned wealth outright but regarded it as a tool for both individual and collective welfare. Ancient texts strongly oppose the hoarding of wealth or its concentration in the hands of a few, akin to modern capitalism. Selfish enjoyment of wealth is deemed sinful, while personal charity is upheld as a fundamental social value capable of preventing the rise of an accusatory or inequitable society. The *Atharva Veda* emphasizes the importance of generosity with the saying, "*sata hasta samahara sahasrastha samkira*," which translates to "earn and accumulate wealth with a hundred hands, but distribute it with a thousand hands."

This principle aligns with the wisdom that there is enough in the world to meet everyone's needs but not their greed. Greed, therefore, is strongly discouraged and condemned. The poet Kalidasa echoes this sentiment in *Raghuvamsha*, reinforcing the same virtuous attitude towards wealth, "*tyagaya sambhrtarthanam*"<sup>10</sup> which means accumulation of wealth (by rulers) is to serve the society. Again the means of acquiring wealth should also be proper. It must be earned through personal efforts. The *Atharva Veda* states," *rayim susugdhih*" which means that the wealth should come in a purified form, that is to say ,in a legitimate and moral way.

### **Kama:**

The end served by *artha* is *kama* which means desire or the object of desire or the pleasure one gets out of the satisfaction of desires. It covers all aspects of gratifications of natural instincts and emotional satisfaction. Desires are significant in life. Man is truly a bundle of desires. There are desires for wealth, health, family, a happy life and even *moksa*. A life devoid of desires is a life without a purpose.

But desires are insatiable. Unrestrained desires can have a disastrous effect on one's life. Hence only with self-restraint, *kama* can be attained as a value.

The ancient literature never condemns the desires as such. They never recommend the suppression of the physical desires or impulses. They simply teach the lesson of dharma that is to regulate and to discipline the impulses. *Sariramadyam khalu dharma-sadhanam*, says Kalidas. It means that body is a means of fulfillment of Dharma. T.M.P. Mahadevan aptly remarks, "*Artha and kama* are not intrinsic values but hold their rightful place in the larger framework of life. Man must sustain himself before he can engage in spiritual pursuits. The physical body serves as the foundation for all human endeavours. Arts, sciences, and philosophies flourished in India when the nation was prosperous and its people were content. However, wealth should not be hoarded but utilized for social sharing."

Similarly, *kama*—desire or pleasure—is not inherently condemnable. However, it cannot be elevated as the ultimate goal of human existence. Desires are natural, but they must have boundaries, and one must discern between higher and lower aspirations. Desires should always be guided and tempered by *dharma*. This essential principle about *kama* is encapsulated in a famous verse from the *Mahabharata*:

*"Na jatu kamah kamanam upabhogena samyati,  
havisa krtsnavartmeva bhuya evabhivardhate."*

This translates to: "*Desires cannot be quenched through indulgence; like fire fed with clarified butter, they only grow stronger with each attempt to satisfy them.*"

In the *Taittiriya Brahmana*, *kama* is metaphorically likened to the ocean: "*Samudra iva hi kamah*"—just as the ocean is vast and insatiable, so too are human desires. *Kama* is like the ocean. Even as the ocean is unending so is *kama*. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord says to Arjuna, "*jahi satrum mahabaho kamarupa durasadam*"<sup>14</sup>. O mighty armed, the enemy in the form of desire is difficult to overcome. Another verse can be quoted in which Lord says, "*dharmaviruddho bhutesu kamosmi bharatarsabha*"<sup>15</sup>. It means that there is divinity even in *kama* provided it is not opposed to dharma. *Katha Upanisad* speaks about *sreya* (the desirable) and *preya* (the desired).

### **Moksa :**

*Moksa* or liberation is the ultimate *purusartha*. Man is never satisfied with his finitude, his limitations, his empirical existence. He always tends to ascend to the higher level, transcending his present state of existence. He wants to know about himself and about his destiny. The reason is the presence of divinity in him. The Yajur Veda identifies this true self in man with the universal self. To realize one's true self is to attain liberation which is the supreme goal of life. *Moksa* is considered equivalent to the terms like *apavarga*, *nivrttii*, *nirvana*, *kaivalya*, etc. It means redemption or spiritual release. Unlike other three goals of mundane nature (*trivarga*), it belongs to the transcendental order. This state of liberation is depicted

differently in different ancient Indian texts. Some texts speak about *jivanmukti* (liberation while alive) and some others about *videhamukti* (liberation after death). Jainism takes right faith, right conduct and right knowledge, all the three (*tri-ratna*) to form the path of liberation. Buddhism speaks about the ideal saint *Arhat* who has blown himself out of existence by annihilating all desires and passions. In *the Upanisads* we find an urge for searching the way from non- real to the real, from ignorance to knowledge, from empirical to transcendental. Man suffers tremendously due to ignorance (*avidya*), not realizing his true nature as *Brahman* itself. Once he realizes this, he is liberated and free from sufferings. The *Chandogya Upanishad* says thus, “*tarati sokam atmavit*”<sup>16</sup>. The released soul passes beyond sorrows. *Isa Upanisad* says, “*tatra ko mohah kah sokah ekatvamanupasyatah*”<sup>17</sup>. This is the state where all the earthly pleasures and pains are equal. In the contemporary Indian texts, we find *moksa* not as renunciation of worldly life nor as a state attained after the disintegration of the body. It can be realized in this embodied state. It is the realization of the divinity in oneself and the feeling of oneness with the rest of the existence.

*Moksha* is a central concept in Yoga, symbolizing a state of "awakening," liberation, and ultimate freedom achieved in this life. Historically, the concept of *moksha* has evolved in three distinct forms: Vedic, Yogic, and Bhakti traditions. During the Vedic period, *moksha* was closely linked to rituals. The Vedas described different levels of knowledge—*adhilokam*, *adhibhutam*, *adhiyajnam*, and *adhyatmam*—which guided individuals toward transcendence and ultimately, *moksha*. Terms such as *moksha*, *nirvana* (*nibbana*), and *kaivalya* are often used interchangeably, as they all signify a state of liberation from sorrow and suffering. However, in modern religious literature, these terms hold distinct meanings across various traditions. *Kaivalya*, a concept similar to *moksha*, is emphasized in certain schools of Hinduism rather than in Buddhism, which focuses more on *nirvana*.

A balanced understanding of the *Puruṣārthas* is vital for both individual fulfillment and societal well-being as we progress into the future. Today, the world is veering toward blind imitation of Western lifestyles, where the unchecked pursuit of *Kāma* (pleasure) and *Artha* (wealth) often occurs at the expense of *Dharma* (righteousness), jeopardizing not just personal happiness but the sustainability of our planet. A life devoid of *Dharma* fails to bring lasting satisfaction, as indulgence in *Kāma and Artha* alone tends to amplify desires rather than satiate them. However, when these pursuits are guided by *Dharma*, they are transformed into noble, meaningful endeavours with enduring value.

The quest for *Moksha*, or spiritual liberation, continues to thrive in certain sections of Hindu society and has even gained recognition in the West through the influence of Hindu and Buddhist teachers with significant followings. Yet, for many Hindus, the pursuit of *Moksha* as the highest human goal remains misunderstood and underemphasized. A lack of meaningful engagement with society among spiritual seekers also persists. A contemporary application of the *Puruṣārthas* offers immense potential to foster a more profound, harmonious, and purposeful

existence.

These four foundational Puruṣārthas—*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma*, and *Moksha*—are crucial for nurturing individual growth, societal progress, and the overall welfare of human civilization, particularly in the 21st century. Despite material abundance, modern life is often marked by frustration and discontent, underscoring the need for a deeper understanding of life's purpose. Without purpose, human existence becomes hollow.

Today, *Dharma* is frequently misunderstood as an exaggerated display of aristocracy, while modern man has become spiritually malnourished despite being materially overindulgent. People dwell in self-created wastelands, consumed by hollow pursuits. *Artha* has led to an indifference toward those in need, while *Kāma* is narrowly reduced to bodily pleasures, often overshadowing spiritual aspirations. Even *Moksha* is misinterpreted as mere freedom from worldly crises—economic hardships, lack of comfort, or dissatisfaction in life.

This misalignment leads to moral and ethical degradation, as individuals stray from the righteous path, succumbing to arrogance and misguided pursuits. However, if ancient wisdom is adapted and presented in a modern context, it has the potential to restore balance and provide the peace of mind that is the birthright of every human being.

So the *purusarthas* give us perspective of what to live for. In this twenty-first century, we look at the world and wonder what we can do to make it better. This urge to get better propels us to be the highest creature on the earth. We find scientific and technological advancement on the one hand and the degradation of the highest species on the other. We have made impossible things possible. We have landed on moon, grown plants in space. We have equipped ourselves in such a way that we can conquer the world. But then we find this world filled with vices like intolerance, dishonesty, jealousy, greed, uncontrollable ego sense leading to cut-throat competition, corruption, suicide, genocide, diminishing family values to be listed among many. Then we ask ourselves, have we taken the right path? Have we chosen the right objective? When we see the present day scenario, through the glasses of the great values our predecessors taught us, we get a gloomy picture.

*Dharma* is ignored and *artha* and *kama* have unbridled surge. Chaos is the result. We have made immense material development on the one hand and gradual degradation of values on the other. We find ourselves in misery and suffering. Desires are the root cause of suffering as our revered ancient texts preach. *Kama* or desires are in various forms- to be wealthy, to be powerful, to get recognition, to have a good career, job and all the comforts of life. Such desires should be fulfilled without violating *dharma*. But man today gets obsessed with desires and tries to fulfill them at the cost of anything. He can adopt unfair means to have his desired objects achieved.

The significance of *Artha* lies in its role in fostering the happiness and well-being of both individuals and society. Wealth should not be pursued solely for its own

sake but as a means to support *Dharma* and contribute to the goals of one's family and community. While wealth itself does not hinder self-realization, an undue attachment to it can. Life without wealth is inconceivable, as it is essential for fulfilling basic needs and sustaining societal progress. But it should never be taken as an end. In some sense, we can say that we can buy happiness provided our desire to spend lavishly does not grow with it, provided we spend some money for the needy, provided we act just as the trustee for the wealth we have earned. We have to find a balance between having too much and too little. Ordinarily what happens is, when our basics are fulfilled, we have desire for comforts. Our spending then extends from comforts to luxury which leads to overconsumption. We think that we will be happier if we just have a little more money. And that never comes to an end. If our increased wealth brings us more expectations, we can never be happy. So we need a balanced life which is a fulfilling life.

*Moksa* is not something otherworldly. It is here in this world. We can attain it here. We just have to develop a feeling of unity with the rest of the existence. *Dharma* highlights the spirit of globalization. Our great epic, the *Mahabharat* too mentions *dharma* as that which holds together the people of the universe. We can make a pledge today to set our goals keeping in view the highest ideals that the ancient scriptures have taught, to keep scientific and spiritual development side by side. We are '*amrtasya putrah*', the sons of the immortal. We can make it a reality and realize the true purpose of life.

*Purushārtha* is a fundamental concept in Hinduism that outlines the three or four principal goals of human life. The term *Purushārtha* translates to "purpose of human being" or "object of human pursuit." While all four *Purushārthas*—*Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth), *Kāma* (desire), and *Moksha* (liberation)—are significant, Hindu philosophy prioritizes *Dharma* over *Artha* and *Kāma* in situations of conflict, with *Moksha* regarded as the ultimate aim of human existence.

The concept has been critiqued for being framed as either *Trivarga* (three goals) or *Chaturvarga* (four goals), and its historical and philosophical dimensions have been extensively analyzed. Moreover, the connection between the *Purushārthas* and the social order (*Varna*: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra) as well as life stages (*Ashramas*: Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, Sannyasa) has been explored. In the caste framework, guidelines have been provided regarding the *Purushārtha* elements relevant to each group, highlighting which goals should take precedence during specific stages of life.

### **The Interplay of Purusharthas:**

The four *Purusharthas*—*Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth), *Kama* (desires), and *Moksha* (liberation)—exist in a delicate balance, shaping an individual's journey through life. They are interdependent, with each influencing the others, and harmonizing these pursuits is vital for a holistic and meaningful existence. Among them, *Dharma* is central and serves as the guiding principle, ensuring that

the pursuit of *Artha* and *Kama* is ethical, while *Moksha* offers a higher perspective on the transient nature of material pursuits.

### **Relevance of Purusharthas in Modern Indian Society**

In contemporary India, amid rapid modernization and globalization, the *Purusharthas* remain profoundly relevant. They serve as cultural and ethical anchors, reminding individuals of their responsibilities and heritage. While striving for prosperity and fulfilling desires is natural, aligning these aspirations with righteousness and spiritual growth is essential.

Despite advancements and access to material comforts, many people today grapple with frustration and dissatisfaction. The prevailing discontent highlights the need for a deeper understanding of life's purpose. Materialism, individualism, and instant gratification often overshadow the pursuit of *Dharma* and *Moksha*. Balancing tradition with modernity is crucial to preserving the essence of *Purusharthas* in Indian society.

### **Revitalizing Ancient Wisdom**

The timeless wisdom of *Purusharthas* offers hope for rediscovering inner peace and fulfilment in a modern context. The essence of *Dharma* can inspire humility, compassion, and a sense of purpose beyond materialism. Reinterpreting *Artha* with an emphasis on societal welfare and collective well-being can promote a balanced perspective on wealth and success.

*Kama* can be reframed as a celebration of life's joys and meaningful relationships rather than indulgence in fleeting pleasures. Finally, *Moksha* can encourage individuals to transcend superficial material concerns, leading to genuine contentment and spiritual liberation.

### **Conclusion**

The *Purusharthas* provide a timeless framework for a balanced and purposeful life. Embracing the principles of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha* allows individuals to navigate the complexities of modern existence while staying grounded in their cultural and ethical roots. As Indian society evolves, the enduring wisdom of these ancient principles continues to guide individuals toward a harmonious coexistence of tradition and progress.

A lot of misunderstanding of our tradition occurs due to the emphasis on *moksha* as a value. Many people believe that Indian tradition encourages man to indulge in meditation and spirituality neglecting his social duties, as a man. *Isopanisad* summing up the very state of a realized being says "when to one who knows (liberated one) all beings have, verily, become one with his own self, then what delusion, what sorrow can be with him, who has seen the oneness.

That is why in Bhagavat Gita Krishna points out "a man who has attained *moksha* need not lead the life of a recluse. He has to devote himself to action which bring about collective goodness to society (*Lokasangraha*). Again he says "as ignorant

people indulge in action being attached to desires, similarly the wise people indulge in action for the service of the community without being attached to desire".

So *moksa* should not be equated with the western conception of salvation, which means "deliverance from sin and its consequences and admission to heaven"

Thus we note that the four-fold scheme of *puruṣārtha* was propagated in our tradition keeping in mind the essential dimensions of human personality. *Artha* and *Kāma* are instrumental values as they allow a person to live at the level of empirical world. *Dharma* is the regulative value which controls the balance between the individual life and the social life and *Mokṣa* is the ultimate value which makes human life truly fulfilling.

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