

Critical Review of Ancient Indian Values: Purusarthas

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Our ancient Indian tradition has given us a preference of values in human life and confined those to four in number. Those are dharma, artha, kama and moksa .It has been said that originally there were three values and later on moksa has been added and this last one has been treated as the highest value so that no one will be interested to think of the requirement some other value. While putting a glance on such values many questions are raised in our mind in respect of their relevance in this modern society. It is quite obvious that the society and social living has been changed, to great extent. Of course, it cannot be claimed that the change has been done only in a positive direction towards a developing state. Rather very often we come across with the remark that there has been a lot of degradation of values in the modern society. So in this perspective it is thought to make a review of the ancient recommended ideals, which are known as purusarthas.

The term purusartha has come to use by compounding ‘purusa’ and ‘artha’ leading to the meaning ‘for the sake’ (artha) of ‘human beings’ (purusa). Here in this background it appears that there is a sense of ‘ought’ linked with the recommendation. It is not the case that man seeks these four goals having a rational choice for him. Rather some thinkers out of their far sight have thought about such, those are to be taken as an ideal after which man should pursue. In this sense these are ethically sanctioned goals which man can pursue without having any kind of hesitation. It appears that the sanction of ethics has sanctified the goals for the human beings. Before going to make a review of the purusarthas in respect of to the extent these desired goals are actually ethically sanctified, it is necessary to get the picture of the purusarthas as found in our literatures.

It has been hinted earlier that at the beginning there were three goals of mankind. Out of the three it is seen that two of them refer to the bare necessities of human beings and the other is to regulate, the two other. So far as the history is concerned in the early Rg.vedic period the Aryans were showing their concern for three basic values, namely artha (wealth) kama(enjoyment) and dharma (duty). Aryans seem to have not relating one life with another life in a causal bond for which it seems that they were not showing their concern for liberation or moksa.

Scholars consider that “by the time of the Aranyakas, the fourth may have been recognized. The four sciences may have been elaborated, the science of wealth (Arthasastra), the science of enjoyment (Kamasashtra), the science of duty (Dharmasastra), and the science of salvation (Moksasastra). Vatsayana says that Brhaspati was original

author of the first, Nandi was original author of the second, and Manu was the original author of the third.”¹

The Carvakas (the materialists) of ancient India, who were supposed to be historically prior to Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira, seem to have accepted two such values of life, namely kama and artha. The Carvakas were very much individualistic in their attitude for which reason probably, they did not feel the necessity of any guiding principle to regulate their living. That is why dharma which came up as a value and subsequently treated as sacrosanct by some for its importance as a sustaining principle (*dhranat dharma ityahuh*) was not figured in the purely materialistic framework of Caravakas. But in the framework all other schools of thought dharma has received maximum importance in various ways from various angles. In the *Manusruti* (11.4.5) it has been mentioned that “there is hardly any activity not promoted by desire, but to act solely on the urge of desire is not praiseworthy. To enable man to act properly dharma was promulgated”. It has been emphasized in such way that according to this text if a society respects dharma then by that it protects itself and if the society disrespects dharma then it moves towards being ruined. (*Dharma eva hato hanti dharma raksati rakshitah*). In this way ‘dharma’ justifies its meaning from the root word it has come up that is *dhr*(which means to sustain or to support).

Man as a rational being has thought of what is desirable for him. In this respect what has to be desired happens to be the goal of his living and also has to be treated as value. In order to bring a balance in individual and social living he has to pursue after certain goals or values and certain guide lines for the purpose. The three initial purusarthas are found to be most desired goals/values and also guide line to ensure such balance. Man works in the important fronts, namely, physical, psychic and moral. Artha and kama stand for physical and psychical values or goals and dharma stands for the moral goal or value. These three are pursued individually but there must be a connecting link between the three or there is the need of maintaining a balance among them in order to have a better social living. Man did not remain content with these three. Along with physical, psychical and moral fronts he also tried to pursue after something in his spiritual front. Moksa or liberation which in supposed to be the highest aspiration of man became his spiritual goal. If the three other values are pursued properly then those pave the path for the fourth one that is moksa

Artha: Kautiliya says that ‘which promotes life and that which is conducive to maintenance of life is artha.’ Normally artha is understood as wealth. Wealth is a necessity to meet the requirements of our daily life . It is required to procure the articles of our enjoyment .It is required to live and also for living luxuriously. It is an instrumental value. It is treated to be that value which is connected with our physical necessities. Our tradition has described it as an economic value.

The term artha is often used to mean ‘possession’. It does not stand for wealth only. It is also used as ‘motivation’, ‘desire’. Zimmer writes that it indicates the “whole range of tangible objects that can be possessed, enjoyed or lost, and which we require in daily life for the upkeep of a household, rising of a family and discharge of religious duties.”² It shows that to meet the needs of a social living and also to meet the needs of maintain a religion life, either requirements or the wealth for procuring the requirements come under ‘artha’.

Artha is intimately connected with the other instrumental value kama. It is hard to isolate a physical need from a psychic need. Because the satisfaction of physical need is very much connected with the psychic factors. The fulfillment of a physical need deeply involves psychic satisfaction. From another angle considering the kama also depends upon artha in the sense of the economic ability.

It is seen that artha is also used in the sense of kama . The term 'vidyarth' stands for the meaning 'for the sake of knowledge' and also understood as desiring the knowledge. So it is as good as saying '*vidya kamana*'. So in one sense 'artha' is also used in the sense of desire or kama.

As a value artha suggests one should fulfil his requirements by the help of his economy economically or in a balanced way. One should not adopt any unfair means to procure such requirements.

Kama:- Like artha kama is also an instrumental value . It is almost impossible to think that a social being has no desires. The desire of any sort has been treated as kama. It may be the desire of the flesh or the desire of the soul (self).

Vatsayana analyses kama to be a tendency or a thought when transferred to action touches four different levels of the being. Those are mind, self, senses and the object of senses. In a very common understanding kama stands for the desire pertaining to sex. But kama has not been confined to this kind of desire alone. One can have a desire for knowledge which is known as *aptakama*. One can have a desire for self-realization which is known as *atmakama*. The desire for sex is connected with family life and the process of procreation. Any type of uncontrolled passion for sex activities neither connected with pleasure or happiness nor can be considered as a value being treated as coming under kama.

Kar very suggestively points out that "Kama stands for desire. However, in the contextual sense, it means that which contributes to pleasure inclusive of both gross and refined variety. It is obvious that man, in general, seeks pleasure and usually opts and may also be psychic or refined. It includes both bodily and mental happiness. The very desire to attain highest perfection in moral sense can be taken as an instance of kama (perhaps as the most refined one). Even moksa which is found to have been added to the afore mentioned tripartite classification at a subsequent period, is said to be done to desire of a special sort(*mumuksa*)"³

Higher importance has been attached to kama for the reason that the highest purusartha, moksa, involves a desire of a special sort in the sense moksa cannot be attempted unless there is a very strong desire to have it. In this sense the fourth purusartha is the extension of this purusartha kama.

Dharma:- Though we come across several ways and spheres of the use of the term dharma but one of the most important spheres of its use refers to the sphere of morality. It refers to those moral principles which guide the man for his own existence as well as for the existence of the society. In the ancient Indian literature dharma is equated with *Rta* and *satya*. Sometimes *satya* is considered as a dharma being expressed as *satyadharm*. However, dharma stands for some principles of sustenance is widely accepted consideration. Dharma as moral principles regulates the activities of a being.

‘Dharma’ has been found to be in use both in absolute and relative senses. In absolute sense it is binding on the agent. It is imperative by nature. In relative sense it can vary from situation to situation. Dharma also refers to the duty of a being. To perform the duty is always treated to be in accordance with one’s dharma.

Dharma aims at certain moral principles which are having universal approach. In this sense it is a significant move towards social stability. The role of dharma is found to be highly essential to regulate the instrumental values. Dharma as the regulative principle comes in the requirement of the individual to act upon the conscience of man to regulate their operation of two other values of kama and artha.

It is quite important to note that without dharma individually either kama or artha may not become value based goals. The harmony among the three is possible through dharma. But for this reason alone dharma is not given higher status, on the other hand its importance cannot be ignored.

It is said that dharma should work as a regulative principle for two other purusathas. But dharmas itself in all cases are not found to be conducive to justice. So it is important to see that the role of dharma is properly articulated or not. The moral and economic values cannot be dispensed in the social context. In this context Ghosh appreciates Sri Aurobindo’s stand in the following words that “According to him, it is not proper for mankind to be the slave of money, as it creates problem in bringing *divyabhava* due to having addition to it. It is not proper at the same time for a man to reject the importance of money. Without the help of it an individual cannot proceed for awakening *divyabhava* in others”.⁴ So it is important that there must be a balanced attitude which is provided by moral principle, that is dharma.

Moksa: - In the later period one more, value has been added, which is known to be moksa, and it is considered as the *parama purusartha*. Man has spiritual urge to overtake the burdens of the mundane world and to aspire for super-mundane state. Moksa stands for freedom. It is the freedom from the desires, freedom from the possibility rebirth, and the attainment of the knowledge of the reality. Thus Moksa is treated as the highest goal of life and the highest purusartha. Moksa is self realization. It is the detachment from worldly affairs and attractions.

If this stage is achieved then the individual becomes an asset for the society. Because he ceases to have any desire for him, he can only think in respect of the betterment of the society or the mankind. So the more number of individuals achieve the final purusartha the society is gained to that extent . A *jivanmukta* always lives for the society, not for himself.

In spite of the fact that moksa has been accepted as the *parama purusartha* and *paramartha* maximum criticisms are raised against this purusartha. It has been pointed out that since moksa is possible by transcending the worldly affairs; it is as good as bringing an end to all values. So the question is: Can the transcendence of value and life be consider as a value itself ?

Here the solution to this question depends upon the expression ‘transcendence of life’. If ‘transcendence of life’ is understood as attainment of the knowledge about the self or *atmajnana* and moksa brings a change in the attitude towards the worldly attachment then certainly moksa is neither value negating nor life negating . Rather moksa brings a satisfactory end to the programmes of life. This may very well be treated

as leaving a selfish and egoistic style of living and adopting an unselfish and enlightening mode of living. Pradhan rightly puts it as “This may be called a kind of release from a lower plane of existence into a higher plane: that is from *asat* to *sat*, and from death to immortality. It is a necessary culmination of one’s practice of dharma. Dharma is preparation for the higher life. In dharma one realises not only the absolute character of the moral law but there by one also submits oneself to the higher demands of life.”⁵ It shows that the point raised by Dayakrishna 6 that moksa is as good as a withdrawal from world amounts to give a picture that the attempts for moksa is like that of an attempts for committing suicide . But in spirit moksa does not stand for this. This withdrawal from worldly affairs is having a higher purpose of life, not losing interest in life. In Indian tradition moksa is not life negating, rather life affirming. So it is fit to become a purusartha.

Prasad⁷ has given a critical remarks on moksa by saying that it is always individualistic and personalistic . He points out that moksa as a purusartha is not coherent with the other three purusarthas. The liberated being is beyond dharma and adharma, beyond all sorts of values. A being who tries to achieve this state neither he has a collective goal nor aspiring for something that can be put under a value category. Sometimes scholars consider moksa to be a mystical state or a dogma.

All the above criticisms against the moksa doctrine are due to the application of logical tools to metaphysical concepts of Indian tradition. If we take the Vedanta ontology into account then moksa will neither appear to be individualistic nor as a dogma. If we accept the possibility of higher knowledge being distinguished from the mere empirical knowledge then moksa will never appear either as mystical or a dogma. It has been pointed out in the *Isopanisad* that the purpose life is not to perform the day today works and makes a desire for living for hundred years. It is important to know the real aim of life, that is to realize the oneness and transcend the state of having desires and be in sorrow. If this is meaningful then moksa is also meaningful. It is the product of completing the stage of *atmajnana*.

At the end it is felt worth mentioning the view of Sunder Ranjan⁸ that all the purusarthas should be pursued in a synthetic unitary from. Because purusarthas are to be understood taking their relations into account. He points out that kama without dharma and moksa is animal like. Artha without dharma is mere greed. Dharma without moral frame is ritualistic. Moksa left to itself may be escapism. It can be said that dharma has to be connected with all the three. Even dharma without moksa may be treated as aimless pursuit. So all these are to be taken as an integrated value scheme. Any one should not be taken up in isolation. Sunder Rajan nicely puts it as the four aspects lead to a synthetic unity or ‘the unity of the purusarthas as transcendental synthesis’. The four give expression to those as medium (for kama), the basis (for artha), the context (for dharma) and the manner (for moksa).

At this stage scholars raise further question which leads to the question concerning metapurusartha. Individually any purusartha is not an ultimate goal rather all the four taken together become ultimate. Here the inter-relationship has prime importance. It is pointed out that “All four of them, more often than not, point to something else which must in fact be regarded as the ultimate goal. What is that ultimate goal to which all the four purusarthas are directed?”⁹ The possible answers are *lokasangraha* or *sarvodaya* or some other ideal like this. If so, obviously this new goal can be treated as metapurusartha

that secures the four purusarthas to be the means. Because lokasangraha stands for the meaningful existence of mankind and purusarthas aim at this. Thus when meaningful existence of mankind becomes the ultimate goal and purusarthas are pursued so that we may live meaningfully then the possibility of metapurushartha cannot be overlooked.

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