

Unit 3.1**VARNA SYSTEM**

Hindu sastrakars advocated the idea that man's life and conduct is influenced by four factors, such as, desa, kala, srama and guna. Desa is otherwise said to be the regional approach to the study of society; kala or time constitutes the historical approach to the study of society. Srama takes into account man with reference to his nurture and development in the contemporary environment, lastly guna or natural trait, implies the natural inherent psycho-biological equipment of man.

The Hindu sages were univocal on the presumption that any scheme of social organization which aims at the best functioning of human, must, in the first instance, take account of human beings from two aspects. First, the scheme must consider him as a social being with reference to his training and development in the natural and social environment, so that he will be able to achieve the ultimate goal of his existence; and secondly, this has to be co-ordinated with other scheme which visualises man with reference to his natural endowments, dispositions and attitudes. The first of these is the problem undertaken in the scheme of ashrams. **Varna is the classification of individual based on his Guna or Personality types.**

The Vedas make reference to four personality or psychological types which are known as varna. Various Hindu texts have come to use the term, which has a variety of meanings (including form, figure, character, and hue) to describe a way of understanding the diversity of personality types or human temperaments found in any society. In most societies, there are some individuals who are more strongly adept in intellectual pursuits; some who are more capable in governance and exercising power; others who gravitate to materially productive occupations and wealth accumulation; and those who prefer to work with their hands, or otherwise function as laborers.

Initially, an individual was not born into a varna social role, but instead became identified as such through their abilities and actions. Traditionally, there are four varna:

- Brahmin - Those who pursue knowledge
- Kshatriya - Those who exercise power
- Vaishya - Those who seek to own land or engage in commerce
- Shudra - Those who grow, make, and labor

The Vedas do not state that varna is based on familial birth, nor that it is a determinant of an established social hierarchy. Instead, they associate one's varna with the individual's predominant personality type. A personality type is determined by varying combinations of three inherent qualities.

Gunas, karma, and varna

According to Hindu philosophy, everything in existence consists of three inherent qualities or gunas - - sattva (harmony); rajas (activity); and tamas (inertia). The three guna manifest at varying levels and under varying circumstances. They are understood to influence at three levels of worldly existence -- physical, psychological, and spiritual. Guna influence both non-sentient and sentient life forms. In human birth, varying combinations of the three guna present as characteristics or qualities which, in turn, are the basis of different personality types. The characteristics associated with each guna are as follows:

Sattvic (state of sattva): good and intelligent energy which brings about balance, harmony, compassion, and selflessness

@Arjunholly4u

Rajasic (state of rajas): dynamic and active energy which brings about restlessness, change, passion, and self-centeredness

Tamasic (state of tamas): cyclical and fixed energy which brings about heaviness, inertia, ignorance, and selfishness

Rajas and tamas have both positive and negative aspects. Some schools interpret rajas as the opposite of tamas, while others hold sattva and tamas to be opposites. Regardless, the goal of religious and spiritual discipline and practice is to intentionally expand sattva. And because guna manifest in the form of desires, likes and dislikes, the ultimate goal is to transcend all three guna.

An individual's current guna composition is shaped by past and present karma or conduct and actions (this is why some Hindus may insist that varna is birth-based, but should not be confused with familial birth). Every human also has the unique ability to change their guna through their present and future karma, ie. by changing how they interact with and react to the external world.

The predominance of a particular guna shapes an individual's overall personality type, disposition, or temperament. But the dominating guna may also be different from thought to thought and action to action. Guna can be redirected or changed with every thought and action through knowledge, awareness, intention, and effort. One's overarching guna can also change or be changed over time. This is key to the Hindu understanding that every individual has the capacity to evolve spiritually.



According to their analysis there are mainly four theories namely:

- (i). Divine theory (Rig Veda)
- (ii). Triguna theory (Bhagavad-Gita)
- (iii). Karma theory (Mahabharata, Manu Smriti)
- (iv). Transplantation theory (Risley)
- (v). Composite theory (Kane)

Divine Theory

According to this theory, the Varna System is of divine origin and has existed from time immemorial. Its beginning can be traced to the Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda: in this context the hymn (shloka) reads:

Brahmano' sya mukham asid bahu rajanyah pritah!

Uru tal asya yad vaisyah padbhyam sudro ajayata!! (Rigveda, X. 90.12)

The four orders of society are believed to have originated from the self-sacrifice of Purusha – the creator, the primeval Being. Purusha is said to have destroyed himself so that an appropriate social order could emerge. The Brahman is said to have been born from the head or mouth, the Kshatriya from the arms, the Vaishya from the thighs, and the Shudra from the feet. This is, at best, a symbolic representation of the rank and functions of the four Varnas. In the cultural body-image the head, the arms, the thighs, and the feet are ranked in descending order. So are the traditional functions. Acquiring and disseminating knowledge and performing sacrifices – the functions of the Brahman – enjoyed the highest position. Next in rank were defence and war, administration and government – the functions assigned to the Kshatriya. Third in rank were trade and commerce and agriculture, the work of the Vaishya. Finally, serving others through crafts and labour – the work of the Shudra – ranked the lowest.

Triguna Theory

According to this theory, the Varna system has come into being because of the inherent qualities (gunas) in human beings. Bhagavad-Gita says: “Chaturvarnam mayasrishtya, Gunakarma vibhagasah”. That means the four Varnas are the divine creation on the basis of inherent qualities (gunas Karma) and apportioning the work (Karma) according to those qualities. The philosophic speculation of ancient India identified three gunas – inherent qualities – in human beings, animate and inanimate objects, and in human actions: “**sattva, rajas, and tamas**”.

Sattva consisted of noble thoughts and deeds, goodness and virtue, truth and wisdom.

Rajas, on the other hand, was characterized by high-living and luxury, passion and some indulgence, pride, and valour.

At the bottom was tamas, with the attributes of coarseness and dullness, over – indulgence without taste, the capacity to carry out heavy work without much imagination.

Those with sattvik qualities were classified as Brahman, those with rajasik as Kshatriya and Vaishya, and those with tamasik qualities as Shudra. One may read these qualities in the four Varnas, but it is difficult to visualize how an entire population could be subjected to the massive operation of such a classification.

Karma Theory

According to this theory, the Varna system has come into existence because of specific professions (Karma). In the Santi parva of Mahabharata, there is a conversation between sage Bhrigu and sage Bharadvaja which tells that all people were originally Brahmins but later by profession they all became different Varnas. On the other hand, according to Manu smriti all people were originally Sudras but later by profession all of them formed into four different Varnas namely Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra.

Transplantation Theory

According to this theory proposed by Herbert Hope Risley the Aryans who migrated to India from Persia or Iran already had a Varna – like structure. In Iran, where the Aryans lived before their invasion to India, the society was divided into four sections: Atharvana, Rathestars, Vastria and Hiuti, corresponding to the four Varnas in India: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The Aryans simply transplanted their social divisions into India.

Composite Theory

P.V.Kane proposed this theory. It takes into account of admixture, culture contact, and functional specialization. All the three components together singly explain the origin of the Varnas in the following manner:

- a) That in the earliest times about which we have literary records there were only two Varnas, the Aryans and their opponents the Dasas (or the Dasyus); that the difference between the two was based on difference of colour and culture and was thus more or less racial and cultural;
- b) That centuries before the Samhita period closed, the Dasas had been conquered and were given a position subservient to the Aryans
- c) That the Sudras were the Dasas so subjugated and made subservient;
- d) That the spirit of exclusiveness and pride of superiority existing among the Aryans with reference to the Dasas soon extended to groups among the Aryans themselves;
- e) That by the time of the Brahmana literature, the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas had become separated into groups more or less dependent on birth and that the Brahman had come to be regarded as superior to the Kshatriya by the fact of birth;
- f) That even such low castes as Chandalas and Paulkashas had been evolved long before the end of the Vedic period;
- g) That owing to cultural advance, division of labour arose and numerous arts and crafts had been developed and they were in the process of contributing to the complexity of the system by creating numerous subcastes based upon occupations;
- h) That besides the four Varnas, intermediate castes like the Pathakara had been evolved;
- i) That there were certain non-Aryan tribes which were supposed to have been originally Kshatriyas but fallen later on.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VARNA

Universality One of the characteristics of Varna is universality. Each Varna exists all over India. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Rajasthan to Assam each Varna pervades the territory. As it occurs everywhere in India save the tribal belts, it is called universal.

Stratification Another characteristic of Varna is stratification. As Varna is a system of stratification, it divides Hindu society into four layers or strata, each stratum representing a Varna. Of the four layers of Hindu society the Brahmins form the topmost layer, the Kshatriya the second layer, the Vaishya the third layer and the Sudra the bottom layer.

Ekaja and Dwija divisions the third characteristic of Varna is the division of the four Varnas into Ekaja (once born) and Dwija (twice-born). The first three Varnas viz., the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas are called Dwijas, meaning twice – born in the sense that they have two births, the natural birth and the spiritual rebirth. The spiritual rebirth comes into being when that were initiated and invested with the sacred thread during the upanayana ceremony. The Sudras are called Ekajas because they have only natural birth; they cannot wear sacred thread indicating the spiritual rebirth. The Dwijas are considered superior to the Ekajas.

According to Stephen. A. Tyler ancient Indian society was divided first into Aryan and non – Aryan components. Aryans were divided into those who were twice – born and those who were not twice – born. Earlier sacred literature insists on a fundamental distinction between Aryan and non – Aryan.

The chief criterion of Aryanness was adherence to Aryan sacraments. Those who did not follow Aryan ritual practices were Dasas or Dasyas, meaning demons.

Uniform hierarchy Throughout India, the Varnas are arranged in a uniform hierarchy. Every where each Varna occupies the same position in social hierarchy: Brahmins occupy the top – most ladder of Varna hierarchy. Below the Brahmins are the Kshatriyas. Lower than Kshatriyas are the Vaishyas. The Sudras occupy the lowest rung of the ladder. The Brahmins are placed at the top because they are regarded as an embodiment of intellect and protectors of religion. A Brahmin is privileged to possess and enjoy everything in the world and the king is supposed to protect the Brahmins. The Kshatriyas are considered as the symbols of strength of society and protectors of nation's wealth and integrity. The Vaishyas are supposed to be responsible for providing all social welfare facilities and such other economic facilities, which are considered essential for the existence of society. Sudras are supposed to toil and serve the other Varnas thus there is correspondence between the Varnas and their duties and professions to be performed to the society.

Limited choice of occupation

Choice of occupation is a distinct characteristic of Varna, but this choice is limited. Brahmins have to follow their traditional occupation but if they cannot, they can follow the occupation of a Kshatriya. If a Kshatriya cannot follow the assigned occupation, he can adopt that of the Vaishyas. If the Vaishyas cannot follow the expected occupation, they can take up an occupation of Sudras. Thus in the event of non – availability of expected occupation, the Upper Varnas can follow that of the Varna below it, thereby exercising limited choice of occupation.

Hypergamy and Hypogamy

Hypergamy (anuloma) and Hypogamy (pratiloma) are characteristic of Varna system. In hypergamy men of higher Varnas wed women of lower Varnas.

There is ample evidence in Indian epics and other literature to show the prevalence of hypergamous marriages. In 160 B.C King Agnimitra of the Shung family (Brahmin) wedded a Kshatriya princess Malavika. Yagnyavalkya permits the Brahmin or Kshatriya to marry a Kshatriya or Vaishya girl but he does not permit them to marry a Sudra girl. But nevertheless, Manu and Yagnavalkya have written on the inheritance of sons born to a Brahmin by a Sudra wife. From this it is evident that such marriages did take place.

In hypogamy (pratiloma), a man of lower caste marries women of superior castes. Many commentators accepted it. A Brahmin king named Kakustha Varma gave his daughters in marriage to Gupta kings.

Open class character

The Varna system is a flexible and changing open system. There are many examples of change in Varna, and inter – Varna marriages, during and even after the Vedic period. The Kshatriya Vishvamitra became a Brahmin on the basis of his penance. Parashurama was Brahmin by birth but Kshatriya by action. The same thing happened to Indra. In the Mahabharata, there is a mention of Devapi, Sindhudip and Vaitahavya becoming Brahmins. Kshatriya king Yayathi married the Brahmin girl Devayani while Dushyanta married Sankuntala. Although Shantanu was a Kshatriya, he married a lowborn Satyawati. There are similar instances in Bhagavata Purana and Padmapurna. In the Padmapurana there is a mention of low born Vyasa and Vaishya Vashishta becoming Brahmins. Thus the Varna system permitted social mobility from one system to another system.

DUTIES OF VARNA

The origin of the word “Varna” can be traced to “Vri” which means choice. Thus Varna means choice of a person about his work according to his nature. From Hindu religious accounts it is clear that to begin with the aim of the Varna system was to permit a person to choose a profession of his liking. In this way, Varna was in no way based on birth and it was not at all hereditary. Varna, therefore, provided division of labour, which was very essential in those days for growth and development of our social organisation.

Duties of Brahmins

- a) Pravachana or teaching;
- b) Yajana or conducting sacrifice;
- c) Pratigraha or receiving gifts.

Duties of Kshatriyas

- a) Protection of all creatures or Sarva-bhuta-rakshanam;
- b) Righteous administration or Nyaya-dandatvam;
- c) Support of learned Brahmins or Srotriyas;
- d) Support of non-Brahmin in distress;
- e) Support of non-Brahmana ascetics or akara;
- f) Support of those who directly serve the public (or upakurvanah) like physicians;
- g) Preparedness for war or yogaschavijaya;
- h) March through the country (charya=rashatrasya sarvato ataman) with his army (rathadhanurbhyam);
- i) Firm stand to death in battle without retreating there from or Samgrame samsthanamanivrittischa;
- j) Collection of prescribed taxes for defence of the realm or tadrakshana dharmitvat.

Duties of Vaishya

- a) Krishi or agriculture;
- b) Vanijya or trade;
- c) Pasupalya or cattle-rearing;
- d) Kusida or banking.

Duties of Sudras

- a) Practice of truthfulness, humility and purity; Bath without achamana mantra;
- b) Sradhakarma or funeral rites;
- c) Bhritya – charanam or support of dependents, not allowed to slaves;
- d) Svadaravritti or marrying in the same caste or always remaining in the householder’s state;
- e) Service of higher castes or paricharya on wages (vritti);

f) Practice of independent crafts (silpavritti) like those of barber, washerman

Interdependence of Varnas

The four-fold division of society, according to the Varna system, was based upon the scientific idea of division of labour. It laid the greatest emphasis upon the duties of the Varnas rather than upon their rights and privileges. Therefore, all the Varnas were interdependent. The entire social order depended upon a close co-operation between the Brahmin and the Kshatriya. This co – operation was firstly, in the matters concerning Dharma. The purohita of a Kshatriya occupied a very high position, and the purohita was indispensable to even the Vaishya. The purohita was Brahmin. Therefore, it has been said that, “a Brahmana may remain without a King but a king should not be without a Brahmana.” Again, “the purohita is half the soul of the Kshatriya.” Similarly, for indeed the gods do not eat the food of a king who has no purohita: therefore, a king when about to offer a sacrifice should have a Brahmana as his purohita with the idea “may the gods eat my food.” Therefore, it was concluded that the combination of the Brahmanas and the Kshatriya is the most desirable and conducive to the eminence of both.

This interdependence of the different Varnas was not only limited to the field of religious duties but extended to the field of vocations and professions, education, marriage and statecraft. There was a constant upward and downward social mobility between the different Varnas, at least in theory. Yajnavalkya speaks of two kinds of such mobility. When a lower Varna changed into a higher Varna, it was known as Jatyukarsa or uplift of the group. On the other hand, if a person belonging to a higher Varna gradually descended into a lower Varna, it was known as Jatyapakarsa or the degeneration of the group. Provisions for both these processes of social mobility in stratification were laid by different Dharmasastras as with minor distinctions about the conditions. It was particularly based upon the conditions firstly, upon the following of the vocation of some other Varna for five to six generations and secondly, marrying into different Varnas for as much period. Dharmasastras did prescribe change of Varnas by means of interactions between the Varnas both upwards and downwards.

Another important source of interaction was marriage. Since love between man and woman knows no rules and transcends all bounds, it was natural that males and females belonging to different Varnas met and even married against social conventions. Such marriages were known by the names of anuloma and pratiloma marriages. Thus, it is clear that there was a close interaction between different Varnas in the field of marriage.

Similarly, in the field of education there was interdependence among the Varnas. Normally, Brahmana was the educator, and, the other Varnas depended upon him for education. Again, in the matter of gifts (dana) the Varnas were independent. The bachelors of the first three Varnas used to depend upon the householders of these Varnas for their physical needs. The best recipient of gifts was, of course, Brahmana and that too because of his character and responsibility, but there was more emphasis on the criteria of the qualities of the recipient rather than the Varnas. The gifts were given generally to the Brahmins since they were forbidden to earn such money or gather wealth. Thus, by the institutions of gifts or dana the other three Varnas kept the Brahmana, the teacher and the priests free from the worries of earning his bread so that he may devote all his time in spiritual pursuit. As a certain section of society has to develop moral and spiritual values, the other sections must help in this effort since ultimately it is in the collective good. Such was the practice in India due to the prescriptions of Dharmasastras.

ASHRAMA

Hindu sastrakars advocated the idea that man's life and conduct is influenced by four factors, such as, desa, kala, srama and guna. Desa is otherwise said to be the regional approach to the study of society;

kala or time constitutes the historical approach to the study of society. Srama takes into account man with reference to his nurture and development in the contemporary environment, lastly guna or natural trait, implies the natural inherent psycho-biological equipment of man.

The Hindu sages were univocal on the presumption that any scheme of social organization which aims at the best functioning of human, must, in the first instance, take account of human beings from two aspects. First, the scheme must consider him as a social being with reference to his training and development in the natural and social environment, so that he will be able to achieve the ultimate goal of his existence; and secondly, this has to be co-ordinated with other scheme which visualises man with reference to his natural endowments, dispositions and attitudes. The first of these is the problem undertaken in the scheme of ashrams.

Ashrama literally means a hermitage, a shelter, hut or a dwelling place for the ascetics. It also means a refuge or a resting ground. In the Vedic tradition ashrama means a stage in the life of a human being. Hindu tradition recognizes four stages or ashramas in human life, namely brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and sanyasi.

The word ashrama is originally derived from the Sanskrit root 'srama' meaning to exert oneself. Therefore, ashrama means i) a place where exertions are performed and ii) the action performing such exertions. Literally speaking, ashrama is a resting or halting place. The ashramas are regarded as resting place during one's journey on the way to final liberation which is the ultimate goal of a Hindu. Each ashrama is conceived as a stage of life in which an individual has to train himself for a certain period and exert himself within the circuit of the same in order to qualify himself for the next. Vyasa has remarked in the Mahabharata that the four stages of life form a ladder or a flight of four steps. These lead to Brahmana which means that through them a person can reach the region of Brahma.

According to the scheme, life is divided into four stages- Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. Every stage has its own duties and functions. The theory of Purusharthas is given concrete expression in the Hindu scheme of Ashramas. Each Ashrama has its own duties and functions which provides healthy restraints on the instinctive and impulsive life of man. By passing through these Ashramas and by performing the prescribed duties, a man can prepare himself for Moksha.

The Four Ashramas:

1. Brahmacharya Ashrama:

The first stage of life is called Brahmacharya Ashrama. A boy enters this Ashrama through the performance of Upanayana ceremony. Through this initiation rite, a person is said to be reborn (Dwija). The age of initiation into the first stage of life differs from Varna to Varna. The initiation ceremony takes place for a Brahmin at the age of 8, for Kshatriya at the age of 10 years and a Vaishya at the age of 12 years.

The Sudra child is not allowed to go through the first stage, as he was traditionally not allowed to have education.

After the initiation rites are over, the education begins at the residence of a teacher (Gurukula). The student is required to learn the Vedas which contain the cultural traditions of the Aryans. His speech and thought must be pure and guarded by the studies of the Vedas. The life of the student is regulated in such a manner that there is a balanced development of personality. Strict discipline is required of a student and he has to lead a hard life. He is required to restrain his senses. The control over the senses also means control over sex desires. The student is also observance of complete celibacy. In this manner the life of brahmachari is a life of discipline.

The place of this Ashrama is the residence of Guru. This Ashram is completed by the time a man attains the age of 25 years. The duties of studentship include the life of austerity, service to the teacher, reverence and respect.

2. Grihastha Ashrama

Once a student returned to his home from the gurukula after completing his education, having developed his body and mind fully and became adept in the Vedic knowledge, he was entitled to get married and lead the life of a householder. The Hindu law books prescribed that as a householder a person should take the wife an equal caste who was not married before, who did not belong to the same gotra and who was younger than him. He should work in order to increase the wealth of his family and pay the religious debts he owed to his father, ancestors, rishis and other beings. He should take care of his parents and grandparents, children and wife by performing necessary duties of a householder towards his family in addition to performing his social duties such as preservation of dharma and varna, honouring the guests who came to the house and helping the poor and the needy.

The Dharmasastras have prescribed three duties to the householders: a) Nitya karma (the daily duties), b) Naimittika karma (the duties on purpose), c) Kamya karma (duties desired along with duties peculiar to one's own Varna).

A householder pursued artha (second purushartha) and kama (third purushartha) in the prescribed manner during this period based on the knowledge of dharma (first purushartha) he gained during his studentship and prepared himself ready for the moksha the fourth aim of human life.

3. Vanaprastha Ashrama

During this period a person was expected to move away from worldly matters and get himself ready for his spiritual journey to attain moksha (the fourth purushartha). He was to do this by delegating his duties to his children, leaving his family and possession behind and moving into a secluded place such as a hermitage or the forest. There he should live like an ascetic and spend his time practicing austerities, offering oblations, reciting the Vedas and the metaphysical treatises, and in the acquisition of the knowledge of the self. He should wear a garment made of cloth, skin or bark to cover his nakedness, wear his hair in braids, remain chaste, restrain his speech, actions and senses, subsist on wild growing roots, fruit and vegetables, honour the guests who visited his hermitage, give gifts but not receive any, bathe three times a day, promise safety to all beings and animals, sleep on the ground and so on. These observations were aimed at controlling ones mind, overcoming passions and developing detachment from the sense objects and preparing oneself for a more rigorous life as an ascetic (sanyasi).

4. Sanyasa Ashrama

This is the final phase of human life during which a person should devote his life and activities in the pursuit of moksha (the fourth purushartha) or final liberation. Regarding the ascetic life, the following verses are quoted from the Vashista Sutras. The person has to wear a single garment or cover his body with a skin or with grass that has been nibbled at by a cow. He has to sleep on the bare ground.

He should subdue his organs of sensation and action, renounce all sensual gratification, fix mind in meditation on the Supreme Spirit, and be (wholly) indifferent (to pleasure and pain). He shall not wander about within sight of the village-cattle. He shall not wear any visible mark of his order nor follow any visible rule of conduct.

VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

Varnashrama Dharma is a Sanskrit name given to the divisional structure of the Indian society. When this order of society is intertwined with the four orders of life or the ashramas, i.e. Brahmacharya or the student life, Grihastha or the householder's life, Vanaprastha or the retired life and Sanyasa or the devotional life, it gives rise to the Varnashrama dharma. It can also be put as the presence of varna in different ashramas of life.

Varna is the organised division of the human society into four blocks depending upon the occupation which one pursues and Ashramas are the four stages in a person's life i.e. celibacy, family life, semi saintly life and life after renunciation. The Varna system mingled with the four Ashramas of one's life on the path of dharma becomes the Varnashrama Dharma.

The first reference to the Varnashrama system is made in Purush Sukta verses of the Rig Veda (book 10, hymn 90) where the different sections of the society are regarded as the limbs of the great self. When objectively viewed, these Varnas were sophisticated organisation of the society that intelligently divided the population into different groups that would help the society function smoothly. Another property of the varna system was that what may be desirable for one section of the society could be degrading for another. For example: absolute non violence which includes refraining from animal sacrifice is considered unworthy of a Kshatriya. Underlying all these differences is the one common goal of advancing in spiritual life based on Sanatana dharma.

The Varnashrama is a natural organised division of the society which would lead to a content society that would be interdependent on each other. The purpose of the Varnashrama social system is to provide a structure allowing people to work according to their natural tendencies and to organize society so that everyone, regardless of their position, makes spiritual advancement. This philosophy says that people can only work together with a co-operative spirit if there is a central point of focus. It is different from the caste system in a way that it has not got a hint of racial prejudice.

PURUSHARTHAS

The term is derived from two Sanskrit roots; purusha, meaning "human being," and artha, meaning "purpose" or "objective." As such, **purushartha can be translated as the "object of human pursuit" or "purpose of human beings."**

Purushartha and Ashrama Vyavastha are closely linked with each other. These help in the conduct of human activities leading towards Moksha. Thus Ashrama and Purushartha systems run parallel to each other. Just like four Ashrama, there are four Purusharthas which are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

Purushartha are the efforts made by the individual to achieve the aims, goals and ultimate values of life. The ultimate end of Hindu culture is to attain 'Moksha' or salvation and hence, man should behave in such a manner that this aim may be achieved. By Purushartha we mean the pursuance of those actions which lead to the fulfilment of socially approved values and goal.

According to P.N. Prabhu, **"The theory of Purusharthas concern themselves with the understanding, justification, management and conduct of affairs of the individual's life in relation to the group in and through the Ashramas"**. We speak of those Purusharthas as the **psychomoral bases of the Ashrama theory**. Because on the one hand, the individual receives a psychological training through the Ashramas in terms of lessons in the use and management of the Purusharthas, while on the other hand, in actual practice, he has to deal with society in accordance with these lessons."

Prof. K.M. Kapadia says, “According to this theory there are four Purusharthas or aims of life- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. He is of the opinion that, ‘the theory of Purushartha thus seeks to coordinate material desires and spiritual life. It also tries to satisfy the instinct of sex in man, his love of power and property, his thirst for an artistic and cultural life, his hunger for reunion with God (paramatman). It comprehends life as a whole, its hopes and aspirations, its acquisitions and enjoyment, its sublimation and spiritualization”.

It is clear that Purushartha, according to Hindu Sastras, is the basis of Human life and it is to be regarded as basis on which the life of a man rotates. It is an amalgam of this worldliness. It coordinates the activities of a man for the realization of spirituality as well as for the maintenance of day to day life. The theory of Purushartha thus covers the total life of man. It finds concrete expression through the Ashrama system.

There are four Purusharthas or aims of life namely Dharma., Artha, Kama and Moksha.

1. Dharma:

The word Dharma is derived from the **Sanskrit root ‘dhri’ which means to hold together or to preserve**. Hence, the social implication of Dharma as a **principle to maintain the stability of the society is brought out in various classical Hindu texts**.

Dharma is so called because it protects all. Dharma preserves all that is created. Dharma, then, is surely that principle which is capable of preserving the universe. Dharma is for the welfare of mankind. It protects and preserves all human beings. Hence, Hindu view of Dharma is that it is the force of power which protects man from all kinds of dangers.

K.M Kapadia is of the view that **Dharma provides a link between Artha and Kama**. According to him, “Dharma gives knowledge that Kama and Artha are means and not ends “He believes that if a person devotes all his energies to the satisfaction of basic urges then life becomes undesirable and even dangerous. Therefore, some power or force is required to regulate and control mankind. Dharma provides direction to the acquisitive and emotional drives in man and by enjoying life in this manner; Dharma brings about harmony between temporal interest and spiritual freedom. It provides a code of conduct through which man has to conduct his day-to-day life.

2. Artha:

Artha means the economic and the material aspects of life. According to **Zimmer**, “it includes the whole range of tangible objects that can be possessed, enjoyed and lost and which are required in daily life for the upkeep of a household, raising of a family income and discharge of religious duties.”

According to **P. N. Prabhu**, “Artha is to be understood as referring to all the means necessary for acquiring worldly prosperity such as wealth or power”.

According to **K. M. Kapadia**, “Artha refers to the acquisitive instinct in man and signifies his acquisition, enjoyment of wealth and all that it connotes”. The old Hindu thinkers allowed the pursuit of wealth as a legitimate action.

Apart from this, **Artha is desirable because it unfolds the spirituality of man only when he is not economically starved**. A man has to maintain a household and perform the Dharma as a householder. Hence, Artha is necessary for the maintenance of life and the maintenance of Dharma.

3. Kama:

Kama refers to all the desires in man for the enjoyment and satisfaction of the senses including sex and the drives to which man is prone to.

P. N. Prabhu writes, the term “Kama” refers to “the native impulses, instincts and desires of man; his natural mental tendencies, and finds its equivalent, we may say in the use of the English terms, ‘desires,’ ‘needs,’ basic or primary motives. According to him, **the collective use of the term Kama would refer to the totality of the innate desires and drives of man.**

Hence it is clear that Kama refers to the basic impulses and desires of man and it may also be used in a broader sense to include the motivation of man which is socially acquired. Hence, due importance is also given on **Artha and Kama**. These, **when pursued in accordance with Dharma are the right functions of a man.**

According to K. M. Kapadia, “Kama refers to the instinctive and emotional life of man, and provides for the satisfaction of his sex drives and aesthetic urges. Kama as the satisfaction of the instinctive life is recognized as one of the aims of marriage, along with Dharma and procreation”. Sex refers to procreation and it is regarded as the lowest aim of marriage. According to old classical Hindu thought, **Kama does not mean sex life alone. It means emotional and aesthetic life also.**

Another belief of Hindu thinkers is that **it is necessary to satisfy the basic desires; their suppression will ultimately be a great source of hindrance in the attainment of salvation. Hence it is necessary to allow the satisfaction of sex for the healthy development of personality.**

The theory of Purushartha does not prohibit physical pleasure. On the contrary, Kama is prescribed for the development of inner and outer life of man.

The good of man consists in the harmonious co- ordination of the three, **“Hence, it is clear that the well-being of man depends upon the harmonious blending of these three – Dharma, Artha and Kama. These three combined together are called Trivarga.**

4. Moksha:

The ultimate end of life is to attain Moksha. When a person performs the above mentioned three Purusharthas he can think of salvation. According Kapadia, “Moksha represents the end of life, the realization of an inner spirituality in man. Some thinkers believe that Moksha is the most important Purushartha and remaining three are only means while Moksha is end in itself.

Purushartha and righteous living today

The Purusharthas are the inherent values of the Universe: Artha (economic values), Kama (pleasure), Dharma (righteousness), and Moksha (liberation). The Purusharthas are the blueprint for human fulfilment. Working with them helps you create a satisfyingly balanced, meaningful life at the deepest and most holistic level. They offer a way for evaluating your life and making good decisions. Knowing your goals brings meaning to your spiritual practice. Purushartha means “for the purpose of the Self.

The path to liberation or enlightenment of Moksha is supported by the harmonious interaction of Dharma, Artha, and Kama.

1. Dharma

Dharma means truth, the right way of living, and human behaviors considered necessary for the order of things in the world. On a grander scale, it refers to the cosmic law or rules that created the Universe from chaos. On an individual level, you can think of Dharma as your true purpose in life or the ethical basis on which you live your life. It is also:

Being conscious in your actions, words, and thoughts.

Having compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others.

Being awake to the existence of the Divine within you.

Ultimately, Dharma leads you to remember who you really are.

Dharma also brings stability and order, a life that is lawful and harmonious, and the striving to do the right thing, to be virtuous, to be helpful to others, and to interact successfully with society. The great Indian text, The Bhagavad Gita says, "The greatest dereliction of Dharma is to desert the helpless in their time of need."

2. Artha

Artha is the security of having the material comfort you need to live in the world with ease. While some people think that to be spiritual means to be poor, Artha is not about rejecting the world, but being content with the things you own. It's to live skillfully in a world of material objects that exist for your benefit. Artha is one of the basic human dignities—to have enough assets to live on and care for your family, without hoarding or being greedy.

Artha provides the foundation for Dharma and Kama. Without prosperity and security in society or at the individual level, both moral life and sensuality become difficult. However, it's important that your "worldly success" doesn't violate the moral responsibility of your Dharma and your journey toward Moksha (spiritual liberation).

Ultimately, **Artha is the pursuit of activities and means necessary for a joyous and pleasurable life.** Vedanta says that you should:

Discover a way so money runs after you and not vice versa.

Do work that is compatible to your nature and capabilities.

Do work that serves society.

Do work you really love.

Trust in the infinite organizing power of the Universe.

3. Kama

The desire for pleasure is what drives human behavior. A life without pleasure and enjoyment is hollow and empty. Kama relates to this pleasure, which can be sensuality, but is also art, music, beauty, love, intimacy, affection, fellowship, and kindness—it's what brings a sense of delight to your life. The right kinds of pleasure lead you toward your Dharma and help you fulfill it with passion. Kama is good and necessary when it exists to support Dharma and becomes part of the richness of life. However, excessive Kama can lead to overindulgence, addiction, sloth, greed, and lust.

To practice Kama from a yogic perspective means to practice being fully present with whatever you're experiencing. Kama is a total sensory experience that includes discovering the object, learning about the object, establishing emotional connection, learning the process of enjoyment, and experiencing the resulting feeling of well-being before, during, and after the experience.

4. Moksha

When you live your Dharma, fully supported by Artha and Kama, Moksha or the final liberation dawns. Moksha is your true nature—it's who you really are. It includes:

- Emancipation.
- Liberation.
- Freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth.
- Freedom from ignorance.
- Self-realization and self-knowledge.
- Consciousness of the Oneness of the Supreme Soul.
- The removal of obstacles to an unrestricted life.
- Access to our full human potential of creativity, compassion, and understanding.

Vedanta tells us that liberation comes to those who know Brahman as that which is the origin and end of all things, the universal principle behind and at source of everything that exists, and the consciousness that pervades everything and everyone. Such realization comes from self-knowledge and self-discipline. Moksha is self-discipline that is so perfect that it becomes unconscious, second nature, an unworldly understanding, and a state of bliss.

Lao Tzu tells us, **“Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is Enlightenment.”**

RINAS

According to Dharmasastras, the obligations or debts that every Hindu has towards gods, towards parents, towards seers and towards fellow human beings are called Rinas. Hindu social system believes that after coming into this world each and every individual undertakes certain obligations. These begin with parents who bring up the children from their childhood, after facing all the difficulties. Then the obligation is towards the teachers and saints, etc., who guide the course of life of a child for the future. Thereafter come the gods and goddesses, who are supposed to have given birth to the child and who will receive him after his death. These obligations are technically called Rinas.

Kinds of Rinas These Rinas in Hindu philosophy are known as:

- (i) Pitri Rina (obligations towards parents),
- (ii) Rishi Rina (obligations towards the teachers and saints)
- (iii) Deva Rina (obligations towards the gods and goddesses)
- (iv) Manusha Rina (obligations towards guests)

It is enjoined upon all the Hindus that throughout their life they should try to discharge these obligations. The obligations can best be discharged by studying Vedas, by begetting children in accordance with the provisions of Dharma and also by performing duties as a Grihastha, i.e., by remaining in the Grihastha Ashrama.

Pitri Rina

Pitri Rina can be discharged by way of having children because they alone will continue the race otherwise the race or family will come to an end. It is also in the discharge of Pitri Rina that it is enjoined upon all the Hindus that they should treat the children very nicely and extend their guidance, love and affection to them. The children are equally expected not to forget that the parents suffer for them when they are not capable of holding themselves.

Rishi Rina

Similarly, each and every individual is required to always remember of his teachers and saints are makers and unmakers of his life and can mould future course of his action in the way they like. It is, therefore, very essential that all respect should be shown to Rishis and Teachers.

Deva Rina

Similarly, respect should be shown to gods and goddesses who will receive them at the end of his life. It is suggested that if Vedas are studied properly. Dev Rina can be discharged by having performing yajnas and sacrifices as provided in the Dharma.

According to **P. N. Prabhu**, “It is opined that the man who fails to carry out any of these obligations due in him during the first three Ashramas is not entitled even to try to attain Moksha, and Manu says that he who seeks Moksha without fulfilling his duties in the first three Ashramas will sink low”.

KARMA AND REBIRTH

The doctrine of Karma is the ethical background of Indian social organisation. This doctrine was propounded for the first time under the Upanishads. It has become the meeting point of the Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

The word Karma has been derived from its **Sanskrit root “Kra” which implies all kinds of actions which can be classified into three categories: “physical”, “mental” and “Verbal”**. This is the general sense of the word Karma. When Karma is performed, according to the rules (Dharma), it becomes “duty”.

The doctrine of ‘karma’ is so deeply rooted in Hindu social set up that it is considered the ethical background of Hindu social organisation. References about ‘karma’ theory are found in our Upanishads. Subsequently this doctrine became so popular and so widely acceptable that it became an integral part of Hindu culture.

The ‘karma’ is essential for attainment of ‘moksha’. Therefore, the basic philosophy of ‘karma’ relates to the performer of ‘karma’, the circumstances under which an action is done, the results or reaction of karma and inspirations leading to ‘karma’.

While discussing karma, it is essential to understand the theory of ‘karmaphal’ which presupposes that every action of human beings generates some results. These results affect and influence the course of his future life. It leads to logical conclusion that what we sow, so shall we reap. Through the good deeds man will get ‘moksha’ or ‘nirvana’ whereas his bad deeds will not enable him to attain ‘moksha’.

As the performance of prescribed action produces merit (punya), involvement in forbidden actions produce demerit (papa). As remarked Jadunath Sinha, “Merit and demerit are agencies which nurture in course of time and bear fruits either in this life or in future life. They are predisposing courses of happiness and misery. There is no escape from the consequences of actions.” Thus, according to this doctrine our present is the direct outcome of our past deeds. Hence according to Hindu philosophy, every Karma generates a definite result and that is why each man is a builder of his own fate. He gets the results according to his actions.

According to Hindu philosophy, the main aim of man’s life is to remove the effects of bad actions of earlier life and to attain salvation. Dr. P.N. Prabhu has also pointed out that according to Hindu viewpoint, the birth of each man takes place so that he may remove the effects of the bad actions of his earlier life and may attain salvation. Further, according to Hindu viewpoint, man should not do so such actions that may affect his future life.

Karma and Rebirth

The tenets of Karma and Rebirth are based on the theory of survival of the soul upon the death of the body. Soul is immortal and indestructible. When the body perishes, it enters in another body and thus goes on living. The soul, during the cycle of birth and rebirth, accumulates Karma. Action, good or bad, brings on its trial, reward and punishment and there is no escape from it. Thus, soul is inevitably tied to a wheel and helplessly turns over successive rebirths, reaping the fruits of past karma and perpetually sowing more seeds of karma and thus perpetuating its bondage.

Elements of Karma

1. Definite Result:

The doctrine of 'karma' holds that every physical, mental or ethical activity performed by human beings has a definite result. Thus, every action has some reactions in one way or the other. Every good action will be rewarded and bad actions will never go unpunished.

2. Indestructibility of Karma:

The results of the 'karma' can never be destructed. The present life is the result of punishments and rewards of past life. They affect a person in this life and also follow him in his next life. Therefore no one can destroy the effects of action because these are immortal. The result of one's own actions or 'karmaphala' may even be transferred to others like his son, grandsons or the entire group of which he is a member, so much so that even famines and pestilences are traditionally attributed to the evil deeds of the king.

3. Immortality:

Since each action has a definite result man can neither escape from the result of his action nor can he achieve the results without performing the action. Man cannot destroy the results of his action. Present life of man is the result of his earlier actions.

4. Continuity:

The process of Karma is not limited. The cycle of Karma is infinite or unlimited. It is the cycle that goes on eternally and each man has to face the results of his actions. According to doctrine of Karma Vipak, once the cycle starts, it goes on perpetually. Even when there is annihilation of Universe, the Karma continues to exist or survives in the form of seeds. Then there is again creation of universe.

5. Immortality of Soul:

The doctrine believes that the soul is immortal. As the individual is destined to face the consequences of his deeds, his self or 'Jiva', after death, must enter into new bodies. It is not destroyed along with the destruction of body.

Though the body will ultimately fall a prey to death and decay and be diminished to ashes by fire, the soul survives. If the actions of the individual are good then a stage may come when the soul will attain salvation. On the contrary, if his deeds are bad, then the soul will continue to suffer from various tortures and will not be able to attain moksha or salvation. This inevitability of reaping the fruits of one's own actions makes the belief in the immortality of the self of man indispensable.

6. Supremacy of 'Karma':

The doctrine is based on the principle of supremacy of human endeavour. It holds man and his actions responsible for the bad or good conditions in his present life. The doctrine considers man as the maker of his own destiny. Theory of 'karmaphal' basically believes that every 'karma' (action) has its own results (phal). Thus, there is no action which goes without its results. It has been stated in the Mahabharata that people who are ignorant of this law of 'karma' severally abuse the higher powers when they are unlucky for, they do not know that their ill luck is the result of their own evil deeds.

Importance of doctrine of Karma

From the social point of view, the doctrine of Karma is most important. This doctrine is most useful to the society, which faces the good and bad effects of different types of actions:

(i) **Inspiration for good actions:** Karma inspires every person to perform good actions to achieve good life conditions. It also teaches man not to become inactive.

(ii) **Inspiration to attain moral life:** The doctrine of Karma given great significance to religion. What is moral from the social point of view is the religion of the persons concerned. Therefore, the disregard or violations of religion is strictly prohibited according to this doctrine. Thus, while on the one hand, the doctrine preaches man not to become inactive, it also inspires him to attain moral life by presenting before him the fear of Karmaphal or results of actions.

(iii) **Preaching self-control:** The doctrine of Karma preaches man to endeavour to achieve self-control and to remove illiteracy. The doctrine says that the root cause of all bad actions is illiteracy or lack of wisdom. Where there is lack of wisdom, bad actions are bound to ensure. Where there is wisdom, there are bound to be good actions. Hence, this doctrine encourages man to understand his own self as when he acquires knowledge. For to acquire true knowledge, disinterestedness is essential. A man can be disinterested when he has control over his own self or senses.

(iv) **Inspiration for welfare works:** This doctrine emphasises the disinterested aspect. Disinterestedness means selfless action. In other words, actions which are performed by man according to religion without hoping for results are the disinterested actions. This conception of the doctrine of Karma inspires to renounce selfish action and to perform selfless actions. A person who performs actions disinterested and without hoping for its results is a Karma Yogi. Works of welfare for others are, in fact, performed by Karma Yogis.

Criticism

A. B. Keith holds that the doctrine of Karma encourages fatalism and hinders moral progress. However, critics of Keith say that Keith has distorted the doctrine and misinterpreted it.

Mac Donell says that this doctrine minimizes the importance of the present life which is determined from the point of view of social progress.

According to many western scholars, this doctrine limits the efficiency and aptitude of individuals. On one hand higher castes establish their authority in the social organization; on the other hand, it inspires inactivity and cowardice among the lower castes. This doctrine supports the maintenance of social discrimination and adopts the basis of the feeling of religion for its justification.

