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PURUSHARTHA FOR INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: EVALUATION OF RIGHTS AND DUTIES FROM MORAL GROUNDS

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ABSTRACT

Indian philosophy consists of texts and scriptures which direct people to be kind to others. These texts are sacred as it states people to have aims which are feasible and help in maintaining balance in life. According to these texts, there are four aims which people have in life. These are dharma, Artha, kama, and moksha. Dharma is the duties, which people are expected to perform. Artha is the wealth which is needed for fulfilling needs, desires and wants. Kama is the pleasure derived from companionship and moksha is the self-actualization of liberalization, which is the ultimate stage of development. If there is balance between needs, desires and wants, then people are rational and achieve respect from others. But if this balance is not there, and a Purushartha is more than the others, then self-actualization comes in a proper sense at a later stage, when it is not the right time for achieving this. These aspects are explored through extensive reviews of the Indian texts and scriptures consisting information on the purusharthas and their application in the modern context.

Keywords: Purushastra, India, Philosophy, rights, duties, morality

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indian philosophy, *Puruṣārtha* refers to the aims and goals, which people have towards leading life. However, there are four fundamental aims of human life. These aims are placed within the framework for living a balanced life. However, living life is not enough. It has to be ensured that the actions performed for achieving goals in life is ethically and morally correct (Pandikattu & Sahoo, 2025). The concepts of ethically and moral correctness is spread across major Indian philosophical traditions believed and practiced by the religions of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain. But the concepts are most developed and flourished in Hindu philosophical statements.

1.1 The Four *Puruṣārthas* explained

Out of the four *Purusarthas*, one is *Dharma*, which deals with righteousness and moral duties. This *Purusartha* represents the attributes of ethical living, virtue, and accountability. Deep investigations reveal duties toward cosmos involving the families and society as a whole. It is considered the foundation for achieving the other aims properly. Evidences can be cited of moral actions which are honesty, compassion, non-violence, justice among others. Another *Purusartha* is that of *Artha*, which ensures wealth, prosperity and overall material Well-being. Wealth is considered as a pursuit of livelihood, ensuring economic security, and social stability (Mishra, 2024). If there is wealth, then people can fulfill their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. This financial stability supports life and enables one to fulfill responsibilities of career. However, if one is greedy for property, resources, then they are not doing ethical and morally correct actions, which degrades their social status. Experts are of the view that people need to gain respect through performance of ethical acts on moral grounds. This is inclusive of the restrictions not to violate *Dharma*.

Reference can also be cited of *Kāma* which comprises of the desires, pleasure, and emotions. Examples are sensory pleasures, love, affection, and aesthetic enjoyment, which is fulfilled through companionship. Essential subjects under this aspect are art, music, relationships, intimacy, and any form of emotional satisfaction. Being within limitations demarcate actions bounded within *Dharma* (Behl, 2025). Mention can also be made of *Mokṣa* or *liberation, spiritual Freedom. This is the highest achievement people can achieve through their actions. According to philosophy, this is the stage where people achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra). People achieve this stage through the exposure of related knowledge, (jñāna), meditation, devotion, among others. The stage makes people acquainted with themselves. In this stage, individuals get a higher escape from ignorance, materialistic desires, and sufferings.*

1.2 Structural divisions of *Puruṣārthas*

Philosophers are of the view that all four *Purusarthas* have high significance. It is the *dharma* of the persons to spend money wisely and take pleasures within the limits, customs and traditions of the

society. As far as Mokṣa is considered, the ultimate goal needs to be maintaining the balance between wealth and pleasures (Nath et al., 2025). Focus on householder's life reflects this balance. Renunciation emphasizes focus of the life on materialistic pleasures.

1.3 Purpose of the Puruṣārtha Framework

This framework is effective as it assists people to lead balanced life. Adopting this framework is fruitful for being moral, material, emotional, and spiritual. Once the framework is adopted, behavioral analysis can be performed on the basis of worldly duties, materialistic pleasures and spiritual aspirations (Koul, 2025). The framework is also preferred by the moral science experts as it encourages harmony between personal desire and social responsibilities to be fulfilled by the individuals among the social constructs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a literature-review on Puruṣārtha in Indian philosophy, considering four aims which people have in their life. These aims are directed towards Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Mokṣa). Focus is on interpretative trends, debates, and recent developments on these aspects. Some scholars have worked for interpreting Puruṣārtha. Mention can be made of “Purusarthas: A General Theory of Values,” written by P. K. Mohapatra. This work argues that Puruṣārtha perceptions as an evaluative concept. According to Mohapatra, (2019), this evaluation does not only describe wants and desires of people but also their valuation and expectations on value/desire. Reference can also be cited of Masatoglu, (2020), who explored the semantic history of “Dharma” and the usage of “Puruṣārtha(-s)”. This exploration discussed the reason behind the emergence of traditional fourfold (or sometimes threefold / trivarga) schema (Dharma-Artha-Kāma-Mokṣa). the discussion is also extended towards link of dharma with social institutions dealing with caste based systems, and the goals which people define for establishing their life amidst the social constructs.

In “Purusarthas: The Value Paradigms of Human Life (The Bhagavat Gītā Perspective)”, Pramod Kumar Dash analyses the framing of aims in human life by ancient Hindu texts (especially the Bhagavad Gītā). As per the arguments of Dash, (2023), this yields references to value schema for human life, which emphasizes empirical values of Artha and Kāma. On the contrary, Mokṣa is considered as a trans-mundane (paramārtha) value, underscoring the regulative role of Dharma to enable proper pursuit of Artha and Kāma. This appropriateness channelizes the life track to the achievement of Mokṣa. Contemporary interventions are highlighted in “Purushartha in Modern Age”, a work of Nidhi Panchal. Panchal, (2023) reflected the continuing relevance of Puruṣārtha which evolved in the 21st century. Efforts have been made to examine how old model serves as a “blueprint” for balancing material pleasures, ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life as applicable in postmodern contexts.

Main themes, debates and interpretative issues are covered in review of past literatures. In this review, several recurring themes and debates emerge. One of these themes are comparisons between *Puruṣārtha* as Normative and Descriptive. Mohapatra's distinction between *valuation of people* and *expectations towards valuation* reveal normative dimensions of *Puruṣārtha* doctrine. According to this, four aims are not simply descriptions of human desires, but frameworks for ethical evaluation of human goals. Based on these aspects, interrogative parameter is added into the validity of the four aims, its hierarchy and legitimacy. Another theme is confusions on the supremacy of Hierarchy and Primacy. Scholarly works sketch scriptural traditions (like the *Gītā*), arguing validity of four aims. In this context, Isser et al., (2024) stated that Dharma plays a foundational role in regulating behaviors towards achieving *Mokṣa*, as the ultimate goal or “*paramapuruṣārtha*.”. hierarchies in this *purusharthas* are not always debated. Debates depend on school of thought, context (householder vs renunciant), and philosophical orientations. Masatoğlu's historical semantic studies reveal different traditions, which are adapted by *Puruṣārtha* schema differently and according to variations. References also reveal temporary reductions to *trivarga* (excluding *Mokṣa*), which depends on social or practical orientation.

Puruṣārtha and Social / Institutional Orders is another theme, where Masatoğlu links *Puruṣārtha* to social institutional structures. Mohapatra, (2019) shared the evidence, which lies in *varṇa* and *āśrama*, which suggests different social groups or life-stages emphasizing different aims (e.g. *Artha* and *Kāma* for householders; *Mokṣa* for renunciants). Recent works suggested use of *Puruṣārtha* as a basis for designing social institutions or frameworks, which increase collective well-being. For example, proposal of a “*Puruṣārtha*-based Institution Design Framework (PIDF)” argues four aims anchoring civilizational vision. This framework guides institutional design for balancing material and spiritual welfare. Relevance of this framework lies in modern life, where there is value crisis. In this context, *Purushartha in Modern Age* article can be related which highlights the existential relevance of *Puruṣārtha* prevalent today. According to Dash, (2023), in an age of materialism and rapid change, four-fold scheme assists individuals and societies navigating between material success, ethical living, emotional fulfilment, and deeper spiritual meaning. Upon navigation, it is revealed that *Puruṣārtha* is consistent as a living philosophical resource, and not just a historical relic.

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications and Semantic History

Scholars like Masatoğlu are preferred for the scrutiny done on evolution of Dharma across texts and time. These evolutions are directed towards etymological origin of “*dharma*”, supporting factors, sustenance and later transitions to morality or virtue” in many contexts. Thus, the classical meaning of *Puruṣārtha* is formed from intersection of social order, ethics, and existential orientation. From the arguments of GV, (2023), debates also arise on strictness which exist around *Puruṣārtha*.

Investigations are directed towards establishing whether Purusartha is strictly fourfold (caturvarga) or sometimes threefold (trivarga: Dharma-Artha-Kāma). The investigation depends on tradition, which affects the role of Mokṣa.

2.2 Critical Observations: Strengths & Limitations of the Literature

Strengths lies in recent scholarships by Mohapatra, Masatoğlu, Dash, Panchal shows that Puruṣārtha is not a static ancient doctrine but dynamic, adaptable, and capable of dealing with modern existential and social challenges. Normative readings of the concepts from value theory, adds depth. According to the analysis, it is not just wants of the people, but also the expectations of their wants. Thereby connection between Indian ethical-philosophical tradition with contemporary moral philosophy is established. In this context, Mishra, (2024) argued that integration of Puruṣārtha with social/institutional critique (PIDF) is crucial, as it demonstrates collective ethics and social design which deals with concepts beyond individual life goals.

2.3 Limitations / Gaps:

Many studies are descriptive or interpretative, which is reflected from detailed comparative analyses done across different schools. Evidences lies in differences between Vedānta, Nyāya, Buddhist, Jain are relatively few. Empirical or sociological research on how modern individuals / societies live out Puruṣārtha in practice are limited. Works on postmodern context has initiated however, they cover broader works which are based on data. These works, like surveys, sociological studies, are few. Most of these studies are missing. Along with this, there is ambiguity and variation in definition of “Dharma,” “Artha,” “Kāma,” and “Mokṣa” are defined across texts and traditions (Nath et al., 2025). These texts and traditions sometimes undermine claims of Puruṣārtha as unified doctrine. Here, another important aspect is the tension between normative ideal and real human behaviour. These tensions are often noted but rarely resolved. Example is the difference between pleasures of individual and goodwill of the people. This difference is acknowledged by scholars, but guidance on real-life pluralistic choices undertaken by modern societies is missing.

2.4 Recent Trends & New Directions (21st-Century Scholarship)

21st century people are inclined towards reviving the lost pace of life. Relevance of this lies in the competitive life, where people are in the rat race with no time for themselves. Postmodern works like Purushartha in Modern Age reveal re-examination of Puruṣārtha as a guide for achieving balance in materialistic pleasures, morality, emotional intelligence, and spirituality in the contemporary world. Institutions working towards social applications have roped in the idea of Puruṣārtha-based Institutional Design Framework (PIDF)”. This framework suggests ancient philosophical ideas which inform modern institutional design (Isser et al., 2024). This design has the potential for offering a holistic alternative to purely materialistic world governed by utilitarian models.

Philosophical clarification and inter-traditional dialogues are nre trend which has been reflected in works like Masatoğlu's. this work emphasizes clarification of conceptual and semantic histories (e.g. of "Dharma") for enriching understanding on the intentions of classical Indian philosophers. Understanding of these intentions is assistance for modern readers to denote later connotations which are to be added onto ancient terms. Another trend is the conglomeration of normative ethics into value theory. In this context, treating *Puruṣārtha*, as a theory of values (not just life-goals), is demarcated (Koul, 2025). As far as work of Mohapatra is concerned, modern scholarships are placed in Indian ethical thoughts, which are evaluated from global ethical-theoretical discourse.

2.5 Analysis and significance of Literature

Studying *Puruṣārtha* through scholarly literature has helped scholars in proving it as living philosophical resource. This is not just a traditional cultural relic, but a framework helping address contemporary morals, along with social, and existential issues. Its value lies in holistic integration of moral duty (Dharma), material well-being (Artha), emotional/sensual fulfillment (Kāma), and spiritual liberation (Mokṣa) into the ethics. Empirical research of *Puruṣārtha*'s contribution to modern life meaning is directed towards pluralistic, and rapidly changing societies. Evidences can be cited of India, where sociological and psychological studies exist on people's interpretation of aims, desires, wants and the actual results, which they achieve. Normative-philosophical work on adaptation of premodern ideas in pluralistic, democratic, global contexts are significant (Behl, 2025). Also, ethical deliberation on conflicts between aims (e.g. material success vs spiritual freedom, personal desire vs social duty) and actual results significantly contribute towards maintaining balance between all aspects of life.

3. METHODOLOGY

Systematic approach is effective for exploring the contribution of *Purusarthas* in leading life on humanitarian grounds. Out of explorative, descriptive, interpretive, normative, and therapeutic, explorational approach seems best fit for exploring this contribution in modern life. At the initial stage, observation is done for the concepts and their application in real world issues. After this, hypothesis is formed, and verified. As a sequential stage, experiments are conducted for relating the hypothesis with objectives. For this, thematic analysis is conducted for reviewing classical Indian texts on *Purusarthas*. For obtaining information, Indian scriptures, treatises, and other religious texts.

4. CONCLUSION

Indian philosophy directs individuals to be kind towards others. Their actions are to be pure and based on humanitarian grounds. It is the Dharma of the people to observe others, mix with different kinds of people. But their actions are sometimes unethical, which is unacceptable according to the customs and

traditions. This dharma is one of the basic Purushartha, which covers the aims that people intend to achieve in their life. Along with this, wealth, materialistic desires are also aimed by the people. However, if there is balance between needs, desires and wants, then people achieve liberation or self-actualization, which is known as Moksha. Explorational design for researching these purusarthas and human development is the main attempt of the research.

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