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Research Paper

Conflict Management in Decision Making through the Puruṣārtha-concept

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Abstract

Detailed studies and research show a strong connection between personality traits, values, structures, motivational patterns and behaviour exhibit. The Sanātana Dharma, mainly institutes the man's desires in four categories dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa based on their nature. For example – a desire to buy a car and enjoy is a kāma-based desire. To spend my earnings for the COVID relief fund or to donate to the soldiers of my country or for the performance of a Havana – all these are dharma-based desires. In the present article, we have considered puruṣārthas as values representing Indian way of life. In addition to this, an attempt is made to theorise and present the hierarchy and prioritisation of these Puruṣārthas.

Introduction

We, as human beings, in our day-to-day happenings counter various kinds of conflicts – many of which actually confuse our intelligence as to which one is better and which is not.

For instance, a student has a conflict if he/she should enjoy or study. A person doing the job as an employee also has many conflicts as to whether he should enjoy or do his job/s that leads to a better and better future. He can also have conflicts like – whether he has to spend his earnings for present enjoyments, *dharma-kārya*, and temptations or whether he has to save some part of it future needs of one’s children and/or emergencies.

In the *Sanātana Dharma*, these desires have been classified in four categories *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* based on their nature. For example – a desire to buy a car and enjoy is a *kāma*-based desire. To spend my earnings for the COVID relief fund or to donate to the soldiers of my country or for the performance of a *Havana* – all these are *dharma*-based desires.

In this way, one has a dilemma in deciding what he has to do while considering the spending of his earnings. In such a dilemma, one takes incorrect decisions more often those lead to his devolution and depravity. Later he regrets and feels dejected about the decisions. Thus, among these *Puruṣārthas*, which one has to be catered to and when to prioritize which *Puruṣārtha* is vividly described in treatises such as *Kāma-śāstra*, *Artha-śāstra* and *Mahābhārata*. If one were to live a life based on solely satisfying one’s desires, our attitudes would probably be skewed. Being motivated by external stimuli alone has a limited and temporary effect on people. Hence, the need to be self-motivated should be encouraged. Indian ethos teaches one the art of motivating oneself and others from within.

In this paper, an attempt is made to theorise and present the hierarchy and prioritisation of these *Puruṣārthas*.

***Puruṣārtha* Framework**

Puruṣārtha is a composite Sanskrit word from *puruṣa* and *artha*. The word ‘*puruṣa*’ means ‘human being’, ‘Soul’ as well as ‘Universal principle and soul of the universe’. The word ‘*artha*’ means not only wealth, but also purpose or objective. So, the word ‘*puruṣārtha*’ etymologically denotes the aim or purpose in life or ‘purpose of human being’ or ‘object of human pursuit’. The purpose or goal of life is called ‘*puruṣārtha*’ by the Hindu scriptures. It is a key concept in Hinduism and refers to the four proper goals or aims of human life.

The four *puruṣārthas* are *dharma* (ethics and religion), *artha*, (wealth and power), *kāma* (pleasure), and *mokṣa* (liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth). These four *puruṣārthas*, also known as *caturvarga*, find another kind of classification as *trivarga* and

apavarga. The first three viz. *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* together termed as *trivarga* whereas the *mokṣa* is named as *apavarga*. It is appropriate to consider *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* in one group since these three are the *laukika puruṣārthas*. It is clearly stated in several texts that the three are so intimately related to each other that each cannot survive without the other.

It is no wonder that those who wish to understand the civilization of *Bhārata* as a whole find in the theory of the *puruṣārthas* a very convenient tool for analysis and communication. For example, William Theodore de Barry's *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Bary, W.T. (1958). *Sources of Indian Tradition* page xv), a well-known college text, uses "the four ends of man" as its framework of analysis of Indian thought and groups Indian philosophical thought under two headings: "philosophies of time" and "philosophies of eternity." Under the first heading he deals with the three "temporal" *Puruṣārthas* of *artha*, *dharma* and *kāma*.

Here are given the operational definitions of the *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* as per Sage *Vātsyāyana* –

alaukikatvādadr̥ṣṭārthatvād, apravṛttānāmyajñādīnām śāstrātpurvartanam laukikatvād dr̥ṣṭārthatvācca pravṛttebhyasca māmsabhakṣaṇādibhyaḥ śāstrādeva nivāraṇam dharmah. (Kāma-sūtra 2.6)

Dharma is obedience to the command of the *śāstra* (*Veda*) to do certain things, such as the performance of sacrifices, which are not generally done, because they do not belong to this world, and produce no visible effect; and not to do other things, such as eating meat, which is often done because it belongs to this world, and has visible effects.

vidyā-bhūmi-hiraṇya-paśurdhānya-bhāṇḍopaskara-mitrādīnām-ārjanam-arjitasya vivardhanam arthah. (Kāma-sūtra 2.8)

Artha is the acquisition of arts, land, gold, cattle, wealth, equipages, and friends. It is, further, the protection of what is acquired, and the increase of what is protected.

śrotra-tvak-cakṣur-jihvā-ghrāṇānām-ātmasamyuktena manasādhiṣṭhitānām sveṣu sveṣu viṣayeṣu ānukūlyataḥ pravṛttiḥ kāmah. (Kāma-sūtra 2.10)

Kāma is the enjoyment of appropriate objects by the five senses of hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling, assisted by the mind together with the soul. The ingredient in this is a peculiar contact between the organ of sense and its object, and the consciousness of pleasure which arises from that contact is called *Kāma*.

Operational Framework

The question of the mutual relationship between these goals of one's life has been one of the major methodological questions associated with this theory. Do they interact positively with one another or do they counteract each other? The question was raised in the classical thought of the *Bhārata*, and it continues to be raised even today. The *Arthaśāstra*, for example, advises the good ruler to devote himself or herself equally to *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, because they are morally "bound up with one another" (*anyonya-anubaddham*).

Any one of the three, when indulged in excess, does harm to itself as well as to the rest. If one's duty (*svadharma*) is pursued within the context of the balance achieved by the three mundane goals of life, it would lead to the transcendent goal of *svarga*, i.e., "endless bliss."

The *Dharmaśāstra* of *Manu*, in its turn, takes note of the different views held by its contemporaries. Some held that the chief good consisted in *dharma* and *artha*, others in *kāma* and *artha*, and still others in *dharma* alone or *artha* alone. But the correct answer, according to *Manu*, was that it consisted of the aggregate of the three which would lead to Liberation.

Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra also noted the existence of competing views on the subject. The prescribed procedure was that *dharma* should have precedence over *artha* and *artha* over *kāma*. However, there were exceptions, as in the case of kings, where *artha* should have precedence over the other two, just as in the case of courtesans, *kāma* should have precedence over the rest. *Vātsyāyana's* own advice was in favour of a balanced approach: "Undertake any project that might achieve the three aims of life, or two, or even just one; but not one that achieves the one at the cost of the other two."

All four *Puruṣārthas* are important, but in cases of conflict, *Dharma* is considered more important than *Artha* or *Kāma* in Hindu philosophy. *Puruṣārtha* is just like a weapon by which the human beings protect their lives and control themselves. The *puruṣārthas* are elaborated upon extensively in the *Mahābhārata*,

Hierarchy of the *Puruṣārthas*

The *śāntiparva* of the *Mahābhārata* contains a long discussion between *Yudhiṣṭhira* and *Vidura* regarding the hierarchy of the *Puruṣārthas* -

kasmiṃścātmā niyantavyastrivargavijayāya vai.

santuṣṭā naiṣṭhikam vākyam yathāvadvaktumarhatha.

tato'rthagatitattoajñāḥ prathamam pratibhānavān.

jaḡāda viduro vākyam dharmasāstramanusmaran. (Mahābhārata 12.167.3-4)

Amongst these three, which is the foremost, which the second, and which the last, in point of importance? For subduing the triple aggregate (*viz.*, lust, wrath, and covetousness), upon which of the first three (*viz.*, Virtue, Wealth, and Desire) should the mind be fixed? It behoveth you all to cheerfully answer this question in words that are true.'

(https://www.mahabharataonline.com/translation/mahabharata_12a058.php Translation by K.M. Ganguly Online source pages 4100-4103)

As a response to this question, *Vidura* favours *Dharma-Puruṣārtha* -

tasmāddharmapradhānena bhavitavyam yatātmanā. (Mahābhārata 12.167.8)

Virtue, O king, is foremost in point of merit. Profit is said to be middling. Desire, it is said by the wise, is the lowest of the three. For this reason, one should live with restrained soul, giving his attention to Virtue most. One should also behave towards all creatures as he should towards himself.'

Further, as a response to the question, *Arjuna* favours *Artha-Puruṣārtha* -

artha ityeva sarveṣāṃ karmaṇāmaavyatikramah.

na ṛte'rthena vartete dharmakāmāviti śrutiḥ. (Mahābhārata 12.167.11)

All certify to the excellence of Wealth. He is said to be truly possessed of Wealth who cherishes his dependants with objects of enjoyment, and afflicts his foes with punishments. Even this O foremost of intelligent men, is truly my opinion.

Kautilya also favours *Artha-Puruṣārtha* -

artha eva pradhāna iti kauṭilyah. arthamūlau hi dharmakāmāviti. (Arthasāstra 1.7.6-7)

Kautilya holds that wealth and wealth alone is important, inasmuch as charity and desire depend upon wealth for their realisation.

Adding to this, *Bhīma* favours *Kāma-Puruṣārtha* -

nākāmah kāmayatyartham nākāmo dharmamicchati.

nākāmah kāmayāno'sti tasmātkāmo viśiṣyate. (Mahābhārata 12.167.28)

Bhīmasena said, 'One without Desire never wishes for Wealth. One without Desire never wishes for Virtue. One who is destitute of Desire can never feel any wish. For this reason, Desire is the foremost of all the three. Therefore, desire is seen to be the foremost of the triple aggregate.

Initially it looks like *Kāma* is the foremost *Puruṣārtha* in *Bhīma's* opinion. But it is not so. It can be understood after seeing the concluding remarks of *Bhīma* -

dharmārthakāmāḥ samameva sevyaḥ yastvekasevī sa naro jaghanyah.

dvayostu dakṣaṁ pravadanti madhyaṁ sa uttamo yo niratastrivarge. (Mahābhārata 12.167.38)

That man who devotes himself to only one of them is certainly not a superior person. He is said to be middling who devotes himself to only two of them. He, on the other hand, is the best of his species who attends to all the three.

The *sabhā-parva* of the *Mahābhārata* contains a magnanimous discussion wherein there is Sage *Nārada's* Verdict -

(https://www.mahabharataonline.com/translation/mahabharata_12a058.php Translation by K.M. Ganguly Online source page 652)

kaccidarthāśca kalpante dharme ca ramate manah,

sukhāni cānubhūyante manaśca na vihanyate.

kaccidācaritām pūrvairnaradeva pitāmahaiḥ,

vartase vṛttimakṣiṇām dharmārthasahitām nṛṣu.

kaccidarthena vā dharmam dharmeṅārthamathāpi vā,

ubhau vā prītisāreṇa na kāmena prabādhase.

kaccidartham ca dharmam ca kāmam ca jayatām vara,

vibhajya kāle kālajña sadā varada sevase. (Mahābhārata 2.5.7-10)

'Is the wealth thou art earning being spent on proper objects? Doth thy mind take pleasure in virtue? Art thou enjoying the pleasures of life? Doth not thy mind sink under their weight? O chief of men, continuest thou in the noble conduct consistent with religion and wealth practised by thy ancestors towards the three classes of subjects, (*viz.*, good,

indifferent, and bad)? Never injurest thou religion for the sake of wealth, or both religion and wealth for the sake of pleasure that easily seduces? O thou foremost of victorious men ever devoted to the good of all, conversant as thou art with the timeliness of everything, followest thou religion, wealth, pleasure and salvation dividing thy time judiciously?

Also, *Kālidāsa* in his *Raghuvamśa-mahākāvya* specifies the same idea -

*piturniyogād vanavāsamevaṃ nistīrya rāmaḥ pratipannarājyah,
dharmārthakāmeṣu samām prapede yathā tathaiṅvarajeṣu vṛttim. (14.21)*

Passing through the exile to forests under the orders of his father, and now coming to the kingship, *Rāma* entered upon an even conduct, just as much with regard to virtue, wealth, and enjoyment of life, as with his younger brothers.

Vātsyāyana's Call -

prajāpatirhi prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā tāsām sthitinibandhanam trivargasya sādhanam adhyāyānām śatasahasreṇa agre provāca. tasya ekadeśikam manuḥ svāyambhuvo dharmādhikārikam pṛthak cakāra. bṛhaspatirarthādhikārikam mahādevānucaraśca nandī sahasreṇādhyāyānām pṛthak kāmasūtram provāca. (Kāmasūtra 1.5-7)

In the beginning, the Lord of Beings created men and women, and in the form of commandments in one hundred thousand chapters laid down rules for regulating their existence with regard to *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma*. Some of these commandments, namely those which treated of *Dharma*, were separately written by *Svayambhu Manu*; those that related to *Artha* were compiled by *Bṛhaspati*; and those that referred to *Kāma* were expounded by *Nandī*, the follower of *Mahādeva*, in one thousand chapters. Also in the *Arthaśāstra* it is emphasised similarly by *Kautilya*.

śatāyurovai puruṣo vibhajya kālām anyonyānubaddham parasparasya anupaghātakam trivargam seveta. (Kāmasūtra 2.1)

Man, the period of whose life is one hundred years, should practice *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kāma* at different times and in such a manner that they may harmonize together and not clash in any way.

All the three *Puruṣārthas* are so intimately related to each other that each cannot be understood without the other. But even amongst these, there is a misconception in many people that our ancestors gave over importance to the *Dharma-puruṣārtha* and *Mokṣa-*

puruṣārtha. This lead to the condemning of the people who were engrossed in the pursuit of *Artha-puruṣārtha* and *Kāma-puruṣārtha*. However, these notions are untrue. Also a specific mentioning of Sage *Nārada* wherein a king is allowed to give more importance to *artha* and well supported by *Kautilya* in similar lines.

Having examined these references one can firmly say that the *Sanātana Dharma* gives equal importance to the *trivarga*. It is noteworthy here that *Prajāpati* had considered *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* as the three branches of *trivarga-tree*, not the separate ones. It also indicates that these three *Puruṣārthas* must be considered and attended equally.

Conclusion with its Rationale

On a careful and detailed analysis of all the above given quotes, this becomes very clear that the theory of *Puruṣārtha* determines the values and a measuring-rod according to which human actions are to be performed or avoided. One cannot stay in pursuit of something that which is not his/her *prakṛti/svabhāva* for a long time. A man practicing *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kāma* enjoys happiness both in this world and in the world to come. At the same time, one must aware that the *Artha* and *Kāma* i.e., profit and pleasure – both must not be diametrical to *Dharma* –

dharmāviruddho bhūteṣhu kāmo'smi bharatarṣhabha (Gītā 7.11)

O best of the *Bharatas*, in strong persons, I am the desire not conflicting with virtue or scriptural injunctions. Such ones lead to social harmony. Thus, is said in the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Bhāratīya-śāstras respect the *prakṛti / svabhāva* of an individual. It's quite natural that humans are more attracted towards *artha* and *kāma*. So, ignoring these two by all means pursuits, man will not enjoy pursuing only *dharmā*. Also, by totally ignoring *dharmā* and by engrossing into *artha* and *kāma* by all means will lead to man's devastation and disaster. Therefore, one must balance all three for a prosperous, victorious, glorious and steady life. In the *Gītā* it is said –

yadahaṅkāram-āśritya na yotsya iti manyase,

mithyaiṣa vyavasāyaste prakṛtistvām niyokṣyati. (Gītā 18.58)

Any action which conduces to the practice of *Dharma*, *Artha*, and *Kāma* together, or of any two, or even one of them, should be performed, but an action which conduces to the practice of one of them at the expense of the remaining two should not be performed.

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