



Dharma (As A Precious Gravestone Of Moral Value) And Its Relevance In Contemporary Society: A Philosophical Exploration

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Abstract: In this paper I want to investigate the meaning of *puruṣārtha* and why is *puruṣārtha* one of the most important concept in Indian Ethics? In Indian ethics, value occupies a foremost place in every field of philosophical thought. To know any culture, we need to look for its *puruṣārtha* (value system). The *puruṣārtha* means the motives and ends of the cultures which have been described as paramount by the wisest men. Here may be raised some questions what is the meaning of *Puruṣārtha*? Could we think about our existence without *puruṣārtha*? Why *dharma* is the first *puruṣārtha*? What are the seasons for accepting *dharma* first *puruṣārtha*? What is the significance of *dharma* in the present scenario of the society? Why is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* soul of Indian Culture? How does *dharma* play a role as a precious stone of moral value? We know *dharma* is a far-reaching concept that embraces the whole human life and one must avoid identification of *dharma* as directly equivalent to any of the various components of its meaning, such as law, duty, morality, justice, virtue, or religion. Also, *dharma* implies the law or principle on which society is based. We cannot think of existence in this world without maintaining *dharma* in our lives for that reason.

Index Terms: *Puruṣārtha*, *Dharma*, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, *Pancamahāvratā*, and *Pancaśīla* and *Satya*.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The present paper is an effort to deal with the concept of *Puruṣārthas* and reasons for accepting *Dharma* as the first *Puruṣārtha* in Indian ethics and its relevance in present day society. The idea of *Puruṣārthas* is a fundamental principle of Indian ethics. According to it, every person in the world aims to attain the four *Puruṣārthas* – *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*. The fact that *dharma* sustains the society, becomes evident when we find in the *Śāntiparva* of *Mahābhārata* *Viśma* saying that in ancient days, i.e. in *Satya yuga*, there was

no king, there was neither kingdom nor punishment; even there was no person to implement the punishment. The subjects used to protect each other according to *dharma*.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The foremost emphasis of this research study is a general study to understand the concept of *dharma as the first purusārtha*, and its relevance in present day society, focusing on different aspects of *dharma* that are established in the Indian traditional texts, dharmasūtras, smṛtis, dharmasāstras, epics, different philosophical schools, present understanding, and others as an ideal one. And also, to understand how does *dharma* play a role as *Kāsti Stone* (Precious Stone) of morality or validity of human activities?

III. METHODOLOGY:

The study involves the qualitative and analytical method of research based on secondary sources, which contain the related textbooks and journals, reprints of published papers, soft copies including web pages, and pdf files (e-reprints) downloaded from the websites.

Now let us discuss what is the meaning of *Puruṣārtha* in Indian Moral Philosophy.

In Indian ethics, value occupies a foremost place in every field of philosophical thought. In Indian moral systems, knowledge is purposively directed towards the attainment of some ends of human life. To know any culture, we need to look for its *puruṣārtha* (value system). The *puruṣārtha* means the motives and ends of the cultures which have been described as paramount by the wisest men.

It is well known that Indian tradition recognizes four distinct goals or ends of human existence. The justification for this is found in the concept of *puruṣārtha* or human aim. According to the dominant traditional Indian social thought each person should have four basic aims or goals in life. *Puruṣa* means human being and *artha* means object or objective. *Puruṣārtha* means the objective of human beings. The four goals or endeavours of human life constitute the roadmap for a happy life on earth and beyond. According to the Hindu way of life, a man should strive to achieve four chief objectives (*Puruṣārthas*) in his life.

These aims or ends are (1) *Dharma* (morality or virtue or righteousness or duty or moral order on which society is based), (2) *Artha* (means of life or material wealth or prosperity and the life system of society), (3) *Kāma* (natural sexual tendency or carnal desire in every person) (these are, in brief, called the *Trivarga*). Duty, wealth, and sex indicate respectively ethical and physical means and physical, mental, and vital desires of man. (4) *Mokṣa* (complete freedom or salvation). Man has to fulfill all these four. In this context, Vatsyayana writes, “A man hundred years of age should gain knowledge in childhood, sex satisfaction in youth and attend to duty and *mokṣa* in old age.” (Batsyayan, *Kāmsūtra* – II) Manu states clearly, “Some people attribute more importance to duty, some to wealth and some to sex. Actually, all three are equally important and creditable.” (Manu, *Dharmaśāstra*– III) Every individual in a society is expected to achieve these four objectives and seek fulfillment in his life before departing from here. The concept of *Puruṣārtha* clearly establishes the fact that Hinduism does not advocate a life of self-negation and hardship, but a life of balance, achievement, and fulfillment.

Sanskrit expression *puruṣārtha* refers to *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*, the four ideals to be aimed at by every individual on earth. “*Puruṣa*” means “person” i.e., or “man or woman” and *artha* means “aim” or “goal” or “purpose” (in addition to the narrower meaning of wealth). Now let us explain the reasons behind accepting *dharma* as the first *puruṣārtha* and also relevance of *dharma* as a first *puruṣārtha* in present day society.

IV. REASONS FOR ACCEPTING DHARMA AS THE FIRST PURUṢĀRTHA:

Before going to discuss the reasons for accepting *dharma* as the first *puruṣārtha*, let us first know the meaning of *dharma* in brief. *Dharma* is a very complicated word, for there is no equivalent word in any other language, including English. *Dharma*, a term that is hard to put into English, is the first of the life's objectives. The word in question eludes a precise definition because it is employed in numerous Eastern religions and has multiple meanings for different people. It has been interpreted as a number of different things, including obligation, morality, justice, faith, and sacred law. One school of Hinduism holds that *dharma* is an essential obligation that is mandated by the Vedas and must be carried out by an individual in compliance with the caste-specific regulations. In some passages of the *R̥gveda* the word *dharma* is used to signify the meaning of “upholder” or “supporter”. (*R̥gveda*, I, 187, 1; X, 92, 2.) “*Dharma* is that whose distinctive characteristic is instigation – that is, which is laid down by instigator or injunctive sentences of the Veda that instigate or enjoin actions” (“*chhodanalakshnoarthodharmah*”). (The *Mimāṃsā-Sūtra*, *Sūtra* II.) According to Laugakshi Bhaskara, “*Dharma* that desirable matter or end (*artha*) which expounded or enjoined by the Veda and which has a purpose.” (“*vedapratipadyahprajanyadarthahdharmah*”). (A.B.: 1984: pp.2,80) In *Mahābhārata* the code of conduct (*Āchāra*) is regarded as characteristic (*Lakṣana*) and also the foundation of *dharma*. Both “*Dharma*” and “*Āchāra*” are deemed to be mutually complementary and interdependent. (*Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsana – Parva* and *Udyoga- Parva*) God upholds *dharma* because He is without want or preference and fulfils His obligations even though they are not required Him. Here is a question: Why *dharma* is the first *puruṣārtha*? The answer to the above question is that we may say that *dharma* is the foundation of the primary object of reaching salvation by getting released from the cycles of birth. Moreover, we can say that happiness, prosperity, or a good life are considered to be legitimate human experiences as long as they are within the framework of *dharma*.

Dharma has many meanings, none of which can be fully expressed by any Latin or English word. Its initial letter, “*dha*,” also represents the earth, “*dharitri*,” suggesting a link to the planet or life on Earth. On a broader perspective, *dharma* functions as the unseen cohesive element, the binding factor that maintains and governs this entire creation in the same way that gravity holds the material cosmos together. Our duties and obligations, our social and moral order, our purpose and aims, and the appropriate rewards and penalties for our deeds are all defined by the divine constitution.

It is the universal, untouchable, and sacrosanct rule of God. It is in charge of maintaining harmony, regularity, control, predictability, and accountability. *Manusmṛiti* says that *dharma* has four feet in the *Satya* era and loses one leg in every age after that. As a result, *Kali* becomes crippled in its fourth and final age and can only stand

on one leg. All levels of creation, all planes, and all facets are home to *dharma*. *Dharma*, in the context of human existence, is everything that a person does in accordance with heavenly commands as well as his or her own moral and just principles. It is not simple to understand the actual essence of *dharma*, though. Just as our human thoughts are engulfed in illusion, so is the world. We can not always be able to trust or believe what we observe in the outside world. It's possible that our beliefs about *dharma* and *adharma*, or right and wrong, are not supported by the evidence. Therefore, in order to practice *dharma*, we are instructed to rely on the scriptures and adhere to their directives. The Vedas, Vedāngas, and *Sūtra* literature—of which the Dharmaśāstras are the most important—as well as books like the *Bhagavadgītā* are the sources of *dharma*. Dharmaśāstras, or law books, were crucial in directing people toward *dharma* in ancient India. It's important to keep in mind that *dharma* is a means to a greater goal, namely freedom, rather than an end in and of itself.

Dharma is a Divine law that is inherent and invisible, but responsible for all existence. In the context of human life, *dharma* consists of all that an individual undertakes in harmony with Divine expectations and his own inner spiritual aspirations, actions that would ensure order and harmony within him and in the environment in which he lives. In short, *dharma* for a human being means developing divine virtues and performing actions that are in harmony with the divine laws. *Dharma* is considered to be the first cardinal aim because it is at the root of everything and upholds everything. Any action performed without observing *dharma* is bound to bring misery and suffering and delay one's salvation. Hinduism, therefore, considers it rightly the first cardinal aim of life. Perfection is the ultimate goal of human life. Etymologically, the word *Dharma* is derived from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ* which means 'to be' or 'to exist', to be maintained or preserved. It is such concept that sustains human life, his society, and the name of *dharma* is discussed in other Indian Literature such as the Vedic scriptures, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana*, and the *Artha Śāstra* of Kautilya etc.

The concept of *dharma* also incorporates the merits of religious rituals operating in the form of unseen force (*adr̥ṣṭa*) as the means to secure something morally good. So, all these three (*ṛta*, *ṛna*, and *dharma*) refer to the performance of sacrifice except for some worldly gains in our life in heaven after the present life.

It is found in the *Bhagavad gītā* that *dharma* is the regulating or controlling principle of *kāma* and *artha*. Thus we may say that in the scheme of Indian conception of values, viz. *puruṣārtha*, *dharma* is taken as a regulatory principle. Sage *Vyāsa* in the end of the *Mahābhārata* proclaims that even *Artha* and *Kāma* result from *Dharma*. Āpastamba also approves, that knowledge of *dharma* is necessary even for those who are seekers of only worldly pleasures.

The *Rāmāyana* rightly sums up “One obtains everything through *Dharma* whole world has *dharma* as its essence of basis. *Dharma* brings about material benefits and physical pleasures”. *Dharma* gives us whatever we desire to possess viz. worldly progress, material prosperity, and all-around pleasure and also otherworldly and everlasting happiness and bliss. Hence one can secure everything through the performance of *dharma*. (Jha:1996: pp. 35-36)

Dharma is the first *puruṣārtha*. The seeking of good as against pleasure is set forth as a human idea. The other *puruṣārthas* are explained with reference to this standard of *dharma*. The practice of *dharma* gives an experience of peace, joy, strength, and tranquillity within one's self and makes life disciplined. The true *dharma* is another name for the Divine Love or Intuitive Wisdom. This Divine Love makes man not only speak the truth but live by the Truth. *Dharma* is the fearlessness that makes us able to realise that to love others is to love the supreme Self.

Dharma is sometimes spoken of as the needs or requirements of the social order, but this idea is not related to the idea of *dharma* as an eternal principle underlying in all social orders. As Radhakrishnan said, "*Dharma* gives coherence and direction to the different activities of life." (Rothermund: 1969: pp. 313-320) According to Van Buitennan, "*Dharma* is the observance of innate or neutral function or essential property." (Creel:1977) *Dharma* means law or duty governing man's relationship to man and other creatures and his relationship to divine power.

"*Dharma* is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth of all things," for example, "only when the tree begins to take shape that you can come to see its *dharma*." (Tagore:2000)

The desire for the welfare of all beings without doing any harm to them is also *dharma*. *Dharma* of human beings keeps alive a weaker person in the society among strong people. For having *dharma* in mankind there are social qualities. Without *dharma* we never think of social equality or a benevolent mind. We are born with taking some *dharma* from the very beginning. We cannot deny that, because each individual possesses some *dharma* by which he or she is bearing life orderly and systematically. Whenever he or she is losing that *dharma*, he or she faces problems in every walk of life. That is why we cannot think of existence in this world without maintaining *dharma* in our lives. One question if we always see that our society maintains morality in our life smoothly, then why should we go to maintain *dharma*? Where is the differentiation between *dharma* and morality?

In responding to the above-mentioned questions we may say *dharma* is the subtle matter of morality and we can say the sense of *dharma* is the software of morality. Morality may be hardware because it is the outer part of *dharma*, performative and active in the sense that one child sees and watches every ritualistic part of *dharma* in his or her family, gradually that child becomes a moral being, and otherwise he or she could never be moral. Hence we may say *dharma* and morality cannot serve his act independently. On the contrary, they always depend on each other. Though in the broad sense they are depending on each other when we see in the narrow sense they can perform independently. In connection with this discussion we can say Ethics is an engineering course and '*dharma* and morality' is like a computer and man as the user of that computer takes a computer engineering course in this world's technical institute.

V. RELEVANCE OF DHARMA (AS A PRECIOUS STONE OF MORAL VALUE) IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY:

In the present scenario of society, we see that poverty, political disturbances, communal riots, social injustice, corruption, unemployability, toxic issues among the young generation, gender discrimination, population explosion, inequality, and environmental degradation, etc. may be the hindrances for modern society. If we maintain *dharma* as *Pancamahāvrata*, and *Pancaśīla*, and possess moral values in individual's life properly, above mentioned issues may be solved by the people of the modern society. By having values like *dharma* as basic value like *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* (equal respect for all religions), there has come communal harmony in our society. For having *Dāna* (liberal giving) as basic value embodied in the Indian culture helps to maintain equality in the society. *Vidyā*, wisdom, forgiveness, cleanliness such types of cultural and moral values help to make modern society free from the above-mentioned issues also. Our values of culture teach us to be self-confident as in Buddhism, we have found that '*ātmadīpabhava*' (enlighten by self-lighting). Now a days we are seeing private public partnership entrepreneurship in the modern society what may be the manifestation of reluctance of the society to take the responsibility of the people. It may be meant that the society tries to promote people to be enlighten by self-lightening. According to Vedic Literature, "*Satya* (truth) is considered essential, and without it, the universe and reality falls apart, cannot function." (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>) Hence, we can say *dharma* as basic value like truth is very much relevant to the modern society. A sense of universal brotherhood helps people to live happily in our society through the Mahāupaniṣadic phrase *Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam*.

Indian culture is like an ocean, in many rivers come and meet. Indian culture has always adjusted with others cultures it's ability to maintain unity amongst the diversities of all is the best. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is the soul of Indian Culture. The present scholar tries to impart a sense of the value of universal brotherhood by the term "*Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam*". It is a Sanskrit phrase that translates to "the world is one family." (<https://in.pinterest.com>) It is a philosophy that emphasizes the unity and interconnectedness of all living beings and encourages respect and compassion for all. This concept is rooted in the *Mahābhārata*, Upaniṣads, the ancient Indian philosophy of *Vedānta*, which holds that all beings are ultimately one with the divine and that all life is sacred. It is an ancient Indian philosophy that encourages people to see themselves as part of a larger global community and to treat all beings with kindness, compassion, and respect. This concept is based on the idea that all life is interconnected and that our actions have a ripple effect on others and the world as a whole. By embracing *Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam*, individuals can foster a sense of unity and help to create a more harmonious and peaceful world. This is why *dharma* as basic value embodied in Indian culture is very relevant to present scenario of the society due to by the basic value of our culture give message to the mankind to do work with mutual love, respect, dependency and sense of responsibility.

VI. CONCLUSION:

In the concluding part of this article, we can say that *dharma* as a abecedarian value is applicable in contemporary society. *Dharma* is completely related to responsibility, freedom and duty (rule-grounded) for the sake of the well-being of individualities asociety. It is obligatory to perform *dharma* for both the sovereign and the ruled of the society. Whatever is passing as wrong amusement in our society for misconduct of an individual, we must take responsibility for those wrong conditioning. Where is *dharma*, there is responsibility. we can polish and free our society from all kinds of immoral conditioning by maintaining *dharma* as a abecedarian value because duly upholds society. *Dharma* gives courage, and confidence to the people to lead their life easily. The man should be *dhārmika* means taking responsibility for the family, society, state and macrocosm. An action would be *dhārmika* if it is grounded on development for an individual as well as the others in the society. No action would be moral or value grounded unless and until it gets the responsibility and status of duty towards the whole society in the true sense. *Dharma* is like software of the society. It helps to sustain, develop, and turn the existent from vicious action to righteous. *Dharma* is always the end of an individual as well as society. Though we suppose that food, clothes, health installations, education, and sanctum are veritably important demanded in our day-to-day lives yet these do not fulfil all physical requirements. In giving reason favour to this people search for a life of advanced and further peace giving up the life of luxury and z category security. *Dharma* has strong applicability contemporary society as it plays a part as a precious gravestone of moral value. No moral extortion would be moral, just and valid if it was not gon through touching of the *dharma* (precious gravestone of moral value).

We may say that without value no culture can develop duly or construc appreciatively. Only abecedarian values can bring change and development in people's minds from colourful sides. Upanisadic expression 'Vasudhaivakutumbakam' teaches us world is one family, and no bone is alien from each other. The vision of the Vedas is so broad that its entire world is a vill. In his or her heart this world is absorded as if in a nest. All mortal and non-human beings are logically related to each other. Then we can say that *dharma* as a introductory value teaches us that the Earth is our mother and all of us are her children, inferring that all the people of the world are our siblings. Such a gospel assured that there were no distinctions of class or status in ancient times. Seeking verity and well for all brutes, *dharma* a abecedarian values like non-violence, intoxication, toleranvce, and reverence for spiritual help to to the enrichment of the people from numerous sides. Without *dharma* as a abecedarian value, culture is like a flower without sent. Now a days we perceiving people of the society are engaged in anti-social activities and also being impatient and not adhering value like tolerance in each and every sector of the society. For these reasons we may say practicing and understanding the true meaning of *dharma* is very much relevant in the contemporary society to have well and balanced situation in individuals as well as society.

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