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## Kāma: Its place amongst the Puruṣārthas

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### Abstract

Puruṣārthas are the key pillars, which lay the foundation to base Life in Indian Society. These puruṣārthas are the ones around which the ethos of Indian Societal Living is framed. Its important that one understands each one of them to ensure that its practice is done intelligently. If its not understood properly, it will severely have an impact on individual living and hence on the overall Society. Its imperative to study what each Puruṣārthas talks about. In this paper, we present what each puruṣārthas means briefly. In this paper we also analyse the place of Kāmashastra in the mind of Individuals in today's world. A brief opinion survey was conducted on a small group, findings of which are mentioned in the paper. The findings are analysed and discussed in this paper, and also to evaluated the position of Kāma in four puruṣārthas in todays world.

**Keywords:** Sex, Kāma, puruṣārthas, āśramas

### Introduction

Bharat has one of the oldest known civilizations. The subcontinent of India was known as "India" to Greeks (*Indos*) and as "Hindu" to the Persians. Indian civilization like most other civilizations developed along the course of the rivers <sup>[1]</sup>. It is a baffling task to construct a systematic ethnography of the Indian population. Different Ehtinic groups came to Inda as invaders and mingled with Indian people, they developed their own civilizations and languages. The Ethnological Variety of India gave birth to bafflingly large number of languages. India also presents a large number of religions. The majority of the people profess Hinduism, a religion known for its universal outlook and synthetic comprehensiveness. Hinduism representing different schools of thought, does not subscribe to proselytizing zeal. Besides these there are non-vedic schools of Buddhists and Jainis, Paris and Islamists. India is a place of living communities and spiritual systems, each evolving along its own lines <sup>[2]</sup>. The Unity of a country is reflected in the evlution of a distinctive culture and that culture has developed in the form of Hinduism. The binding force of this Indian culture is Sanskrit whose unifying influence can seldom be disputed. That language is Sanskrit and that literature is Sanskirt literature, the only repository of Veda or Knowledge in widest sense; the only vehicle of Hindu theology, philosophy, Law and mythology <sup>[3]</sup>.

The ancient thinkers of Vedic age recognized that for an overall balanced and complete development of any man or a woman it is important that they categorize it. The four human objectives were termed as Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa. These Puruṣārthas are recognized as the basis of the Hindu way of Life and Indian Social system.

It would be important to understand the word Puruṣārthas and even more important what the word Purusha mean. Purusha here indicates the individual who is endowed with the three qualities of Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Individual is under their influence and works according to its own constitution and inclinations. For better understanding, the Purusha here is understood as the one who possess Three bodies (Sthul-Sukshma-Kaarana) and the one with Five Layers (Annamaya-Pranamaya-Manomaya-Vidnyanmaya-Anandamaya). For the scope of these

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<sup>1</sup> Sailendra Nath Sen : Ancient Indian History and Civilization, New Age International (P) Limited, Publishers, New Delhi, Second Edition, 1999, Introduction p.1-4

<sup>2</sup> Radha Kumud Mookerji, Hindu Civilization, 1936, P.136

<sup>3</sup> Hinduism, p.13

Studies we are considering Purusha who possesses these bodies and Layers. Definition of Purusha as beyond the three bodies and the five layers is beyond the scope of this study.

Hindu culture proposes on this understanding that the Human beings can choose and hence the scriptures propose there are four pursuits of Human life (Dharma-Artha-Kāma-Mokṣa). In broad terms these are the four pursuits that Shastras posit. Each of them having its own significance and proposes a balanced and harmonious approach towards leading life.

These four Puruṣārthas are considered as psycho-moral bases on which Āśramas System is based. We can't miss one to jump to another to reach the ultimate understanding of self (Mokṣh). Hence in different shastras, Vedas, Mahabharata mentions all these four Puruṣārthas as rung of the ladder, which leads to the abode "Brahman". Mokṣa as it is the highest Human goal to be achieved, is beyond the perception and doesn't fall into the paradigm of this perceived world, hence through this paper the discussion would be based on (Dharma, Artha and Kāma). This triad is called Trivarga. Collection of three is called Trivarga (Dharma-Artha-Kāma) [4]. Trivarga relates to different aspects or needs of human minds (psychobiological - material - prosperity). In other words Trivarga covers the overall requirement of human mind (human being) which can be quite unique & complex to each individual. Shastras claim to fulfill these needs and more importantly creating harmony with minimal or no conflict if followed well. Therefore, study of Shastra related to Trivarga and its accurate understanding would enable one to practice 'Trivarga' harmoniously and most importantly bring harmony to their living. So before we dive into what these different puruṣārthas are, let's briefly see what puruṣārthas actually means.

Puruṣārthas, पुरुषस्य अर्थः – Human beings life purpose or objectives or achievable, is termed as puruṣārthas. According to Hindu Scriptures it specifies there are four types of such objectives of Human Life, it is specified as “Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa” [5]. Know and understand that these are the Four Puruṣārthas are the objectives of Human Being, says Manu smṛiti [6]. As in Indian thought always thrived on healthy debates, so that intelligent concensus and insights helpful for people were derived. The Vaishav sect, the Vaishnavas [7] mention that the fifth puruṣārthas is “Bhakti”. In the path of devotion, Bhakti has the highest place and hence the Vaishnavas believe one of the most important objective of their life is Bhakti and they do propose that the fifth Puruṣārthas is Bhakti [8].

Another thought on In Mahabharata, it comes that, Human beings are created by Gods which is ubiquitously known, so striving to achieve the knowledge of the gods is the ultimate objective of Human beings [9].

4 त्रिवर्गः, पुं. (त्रयानां वर्गः समूहः) धर्म-  
कामार्थाः। इत्यमरः। २।७।५८॥ (यथा,  
महाभारते। १।१८१।३।

“यो हि कारणतः क्रोधं संजातं क्षन्तुमर्हति।  
नालं स मनुजः सम्यक् त्रिवर्गं परिरक्षितुम् ॥”  
“त्रिवर्गंश्चापि यः प्रोक्तस्तमिहैकमनाः शृणु।  
क्षयः स्थानञ्च बुद्धिश्च त्रिवर्गः परमस्तथा ॥”  
सत्त्वरजस्तमांसि। इति मेदिनी। गे, ३७॥

5 अग्निपुराणे - “धर्मार्थकाममोक्षाश्च पुरुषार्था उदाहृताः ॥

6 यथा, मनुः। ७।१००। “एतच्चतुर्विधं विद्यात् पुरुषार्थप्रयोजनम् ॥”

7 विष्णुदेवता अस्य। अण्। विष्णु- मन्त्रोपासकः। विष्णुभक्तः

8 श्रेष्ठावमते भक्तिरपि पुरुषेष्टत्वात् पुरुषार्थः/ गोस्वामिमते भक्तिः पञ्चमपुरुषार्थः

9 पुरुष- कारः। यथा, महाभारते। ३।१७९।२७।

“दैवं पुरुषकारेण को वञ्चयितुमर्हति।  
दैवमेव परं मन्ये पुरुषार्थो निरर्थकः ॥”

Sankyas school of thought proposes that the Human being makes choice based on its Intellect and it always makes the choice inclined to either get happiness or enjoyment in this world or happiness and peace that is promised which is beyond this worldly happiness, so in other words, that which Intellect desires, its either Bhoga or Apavarga [10]

As earlier defined, we are dealing with Purusha which consists of three bodies and Five layers the puruṣārthas beyond the layers and bodies, which is Mokṣa is not the focus of this paper. The Trivarga is and Kāmas place amongst these three.

“We speak of the Puruṣārthas as the psychomoral basis of the Āśramas theory because on the one hand the individual receives a psychological training through the āśramas in terms of lessons in the use of management of the Puruṣārthas; while on the other hand, in actual practice, he has to deal with the society in accordance with these lessons” [11]

We see it has a huge impact on our living, it is worth debate and analysis on the need of Puruṣārthas, but its impact on our psyche and hence on our lifestyle cannot be ignored. A harmonious society is formed of the individuals who are well balanced and have minimal conflicts, In other words, a well-balanced Fulfilled individual is balanced and contented on all the layers of his being; physical, mental, Intellectual and emotional.

Hindu Shastras have prescribed lessons in guiding the human being keeping in mind, its innate nature and hence the four Puruṣārthas (Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣh). They are considered (by Hindu culture) imperative guidelines for human expression of their natural inclinations in the vast society of Individuals with varied and many a times with contradicting interests, hence to maintain harmony in a society with individuals with different inclinations is quite a challenge.

Let's discuss just the Artha –Dharma- Kāma puruṣārthas briefly:

Artha Puruṣārthas is one of the Four puruṣārthas. “Artha” word can be studied and it stands for several meanings such as विषयः (Objects)। याच्ना (Desire to have)। धनं (Money/Wealth)। कारणं (cause)। कारणं (Instrument)। वस्तु (Material)। शब्दप्रतिपाद्यः (Meaning of the word)। निवृत्तिः (Renunciation)। प्रयोजनं (purpose). In this context of Puruṣārthas, Wealth, Cause, Instrument and Material are more relevant. Artha is the means to achieve things that mind desires. Money is the popular meaning and Money in today's system is the means to comfort, security and a lot of aspects of Human Life. Hence this Puruṣārthas is very much something without which one cannot lead a healthy happy life in today's modern world. Its difficult to live in today's system if Artha puruṣārthas is not focused upon or focused. Hitopadesha a popular book of stories teaching morality says, that Artha means everything, one who has Artha he is verily powerful. In today's world, one who has power of wealth, is indeed revered as a gem of knowledge [12]. This is one of the Trivargas. Kumarsambhava in his book also mentions, how can anyone go under sorrow or trouble who follows Artha and Dharma hand-in-hand, Dharma and Artha are like bank of flowing rivers, which keeps the water in

10 साङ्ख्यमते पुरुषाय बुद्धेरिष्टे भोगेऽपवर्गे च।

11 - P H Prabhu - Hindu Social Organization [Popular Book Depot, Bombay 1954, pg. 78.

12 “अर्थेन बलवान् सर्व्वः अर्थार्द्रवति पण्डितः”।

इति हितोपदेशे। अयञ्च त्रिवर्गस्यान्तर्गतः।

check and is ever resourceful and never destructive <sup>[13]</sup>. Artha originates from Rajas quality in this world of TriGunas (Three qualities), Kāma and Dharma both are originated from Tamas and Satva respectively. This tells us that Rajas entails lot of movement (Selfishly motivated) as it is backed by Raju guna. Dharma on the other hand which is originated from Satva guna brings about alertness and is more sensitive towards others needs and hence helps to bring about a sense of care and eventually harmony amongst the beings of society <sup>[14]</sup>

Dharma, is an extraordinarily rich and complex one, the breadth, depth, and Importance of which has few if any parallels in the Hindu tradition. It is variously translated as law, religion, morality, and virtue, its opposite, adharma, taking on the contrary range of meanings. Etymologically, dharma originates from the root 'dhr', which means "to support", 'to undergird', 'to establish'," and might thus be described as that which "properly undergirds or establishes something from a

certain point of view, prescriptively and/or descriptively" <sup>[15]</sup>

For example, if it is said that a woman's dharma is to be a wife, it may mean both that a woman should be a wife and that it is in woman's nature to occupy a wifely position and fulfill wifely roles, just as it is the dharma of fire to burn. Indeed, it is this sort of semantic ambiguity that makes the term so elusive yet compelling, and it could well be argued that one essential facet of Hinduism throughout its

multiple millennia and often widely divergent forms is some concerted effort to understand, work through, make sense of, interpret, articulate, and implement dharma-dharma is a constant thread in the almost dizzying variety of social, historical, cultural, and religious forms that is Hinduism. Perhaps most succinctly, dharma can be said to be about order-especially order as opposed to chaos. In a world that is recognized to be full of flux, contingency, and paradox, dharma is the order that keeps individual lives, social structures, mischievous divinities, and natural or cosmic forces from reeling out of control. It keeps things in balance, in bounds-it structures, contains, and grounds. These distinctions between relative and universal dharmas are recognized within the Hindu tradition and given names: sanatana dharma, eternal dharma, and svadharma, individual dharma. As there are other dharmas, too, that inform moral reasoning and frame meanings, roles, and duties in social life. What may be right for a woman may be wrong for a man, a brahmin's dharma differs from that of a Kshatriys, a child's from that of a parent. Dharma in all its complexities and perplexities may be said to be the central preoccupation of the lot of shashtras especially Mahabharata. 'Dharma' seems to be the thread that runs through Artha & Kāma, we can see its various glorifications in all Smruthi Granths. The Sanskrit term 'Dharma' Dharma typically aims at or is expected to hold individual accountable so they can be a part in maintaining harmony, Social Stability. "Dharma is created for well being of all the creatures" says Krishna in Mahabharta. 'Dharma' protects or is created to serve one and all. It is created to preserve all.

"Dharma" concept is quite intangible and is always open for debate if not understood deeply. It can have a lot of arguments if it is understood superficially. The scope of what Dharma

covers is wide because all the exists in this manifest and manifested world falls in the purview of Dharma. The results or consequences of ones actions can be understood whether Dharma principal was followed or not. Then the scope of Dharma is all encompassing. It would'nt be an overstatement to say that Karma & Artha are inevitably related or intertwined with Dharma for guidance for harmonious living.

Kāma alone without Dharma, and Artha alone without Dharma would be quite perturbing as the final consequence. Infact 'Dharma' is related to "Kāma" & "Artha",

Without Kāma and Artha as subject matters, 'Dharma' has no 'Operative Substratum'. It won't be appropriate to say that Dharma depends on 'Kāma' but there would be no Subject matter for 'Dharma' if 'Kāma' was not in place. Infact 'Artha' also it seems to exist because of the 'Kāma'. More of this will be discussed as we take up the Artha "Puruṣārthas"

As discussed earlier, concept of Dharma may change from person to person and it really depends on the time and place and cultural beliefs, tendencies and physiological conditioning of an individual. However, Principal of Dharma is eternal, as mentioned above, its sole objective is holding together and harmony. Hence, scope of Dharma can be quite vague and wide as its literally encompasses everything.

'Kāma' stands for 'Physobiological' need of the human being. This is indispensable to human / individual existence. "Kāma" one of the four Puruṣārthas has been looked at, discussed and deliberated upon. Kāma is the central focus on this thesis. Especially its place in the four pursuits will be deliberated.

"Kāma" is one extensive topic, in fact also the idea of thesis is to re-analyse "Kāma" and its place in the four Puruṣārthas as the topic little suggests. "Kāma" is popularly translated as "Sex" or "Lust" which is really quite limited understanding of this word. There has always been a sense of condescending outlook towards "Kāma" puruṣārthas.

"Kāma" means desire and desire is not limited to sex or lust. Hence, it needs to deliberate what "Kāma" represents or means.

"Kāma" represents one and all desires of a being. In this case, it covers the whole gamut of Desires. If we want to introspect the origin of desires, we have to analyse and trace its beginning. All what we experience is when we come to know about the desire. We feel it, it occurs in our mind. It could be because of memory of past experience, curiosity of unknown or perception about what could be that experience, which might resonate with our tendencies our likings.

So "Kāma" as it encompasses all the desires of the human being. All other aspects of Trivargas, would no doubt be dependent on the very basis of the kind of desires one has. Infact guiding the desires in its function so harmony and stability is maintained seems to be the function of Dharma. Artha seems to be the tool to facilitate 'Kāma' to function. So the scope of 'Kāma' is quite vast and to limit it to mere sex & lust is quite superficial.

Each Puruṣārthas (Dharma / Artha / Kāma / Mokṣa) has its place in the pursuits of human existence or leading human life. But to look at objectively role of "Desires" or "Kāma" opens a complete new paradigm than in the limited view. Infact, we often read in various religious writings, "Dharma" is extoled and "Kāma" is looked down upon.

While "Dharma" is the one that makes the "Kāma" or Desire reach to its harmonious state. It would'nt be an exaggeration to say that without "Kāma", Dharma has no reference or nothing to control.

Infact in an episode in Mahabharata where after the or at the end of the Kurushetra battle, Dharmaraja asks his close

<sup>13</sup> "कस्यार्थधर्मो नद पीडयामि

सिन्धोस्तटावोथैव प्रवृद्धः ।" इति कुभारसम्भवे ।

<sup>14</sup> "तमसोलक्षणं कामो राजसस्वर्थ उच्यते

सत्त्वस्य लक्षणं धर्मः श्रेष्ठ्यमेषां यथोत्तरं" इति मनुः ।

<sup>15</sup> Lipner 1994: 861

associates a question, which Puruṣārthas among Dharma, Artha, Kāma & Mokṣa is the most superior? The gathered scholars and attendees obviously praise Dharma-Artha-Mokṣa. Shri Bhimsena does not respond or react and when Dharmaraja asks him, Bhimsena astounds all by saying 'Kāma' is the most important. When Yudhishtira expresses his surprise and asks for an analysis, Shri Bhimsena tells him that without Desire (Kāma) no Puruṣārthas can be realized. One must have desire to do "Dharma" or the desire to earn money rightfully (and use it for dharmic purposes) or yearning to obtain Mokṣa. In other words the most basic requirement is to have the "Kāma" to achieve something. Shri Bhimsena also tells the gathering, that the word "Kāma" is interpreted quite in a negative manner which usually happens, Kāma means selfish desire but Shri Bheema says that Kāma is our intrinsic desire (inner motivation) to obtain something. Bheema a loyal devotee of Shri Krishna, also says lord Krishna declares in Geeta, that he is the Desire in the soul, while explaining the Vibhuti rupas. "Kāma" is used synonymously for 'Sex' or 'Lust' and most of the literature that is available is related to Sex, the prominent and most popular amongst them is Vatsayana's Kāmasutra. There are several authors who have written on this topic, here are prominent contributors Kokkoka the author of Ratirahasya. Padmasri a buddhist monk and a worshipper of Majusri an Tara, his work is Nagara - Sarvasa. Jyotirasa or Jyotisvara or Kavisekhara, the author of Pancasayaka. Immadi Praudhadevaraja author of Ratiratnapradipika. Virabhadradeva's work Kandarpacudamani is a metrical commentary on Kāmasutra of Vatsayana. It is imperative that the right analysis should be done and then findings on how it affects each Individual should be presented, this will help us all in the way we lead life. It is clear from this short review that Kāma is quintessential Puruṣārtha, and most importantly it forms the operative subject matter of all Puruṣārthas or is the motivation of all Puruṣārthas.

### Problem Identification

Human beings have a choice and living in the society, they choose based on what they desire but the society acceptance is quite important to majority of the people. Being accepted in the society and being lauded in the society brings satisfaction to the beings and hence its quite important, that need is fulfilled. We see that our culture has a huge impact on how one thinks. Studying about Dharmashastras or Mokṣa Shastras and Artha Shastras is well respected in the society. But the Kāmashastra is looked down upon. People who are interested in this Shastra of "Kāma" are generally considered leaning towards lower tendencies. Talking about Sex or desires related to Sex and fantasies is related to popular belief of someone not having enough control on their senses. Not having enough control on senses is considered as a failure in spiritual progress or a man/woman with fractured will power. While this is a misconception, it has become strong belief in people and it affects their thinking pattern and hence the choice immensely. We wanted to educate people about Kāmashastra and take an opinion survey and corroborate and debunk the wrong image of Kāma in the society today.

### Method

A opinion survey of the community which was adept in their studies of various shastras was the sample group of the study. A questionnaire about their view of Kāmashastra was first noted down and tabulated. After the initial survey was taken, then there was presentation given by me on what are the

topics of Kāmashastra and what all does it cover, what are the objectives of Kaamshastra were discussed.

After the presentation, again post-presentation survey was taken to compute the delta in the change in the opinion about "Kāmashastra" was done. Results and Findings were noted.

### Discussion

Several reasons are a factor, when a decision is made. Knowledge and the view or perception of a particular knowledge in the society is also important. Kāma is synonymously used for Sex and in modern India talking about sex is considered a taboo or uncivil. This view comes from the cultural influence it has had on generations. But on analysis it is observed that the ancestral view of this is quite different than what is popularly believed to be true. Our ancient temples have openly displayed the sexual positions and woman and men with attractive bodies sculpted out. It would not be extreme to infer that as temples were the places of gathering and meetings, maximum people would be exposed to these sculptures, and inspiring them and educate them of the sexual sport. It shows the openness of the society then. Ancient Indians knew that Kāma is a natural instinct. Four Āśramas were considered as four grades of training. All the goals and the āśramas helped man in his overall development. Among the four goals moksa related to metaphysical world and the rest to the physical and mental world. Ancient Indians have assigned a proper place for Kāma in human life. The practice of Kāma helps man to develop individually and socially. Abstention from Kāma helps man develop individually and socially. It shall create conflicts which affects the psychological health of the human being. Hence ancients have studied Kāma and given it a proper place in life. However, later on as Dharma and Mokṣa puruṣārthas started to gain a lot more Significance, especially with the advent of Buddhism and Jainism. This continued and this attitude is even seen today. Misconceptions is the key root cause for this.

Survey: Questions regarding why would you read Kāmasutra and what are the contents of Kāmasutra were asked. 80 % of the sample group answered they were less inclined to read Kāmasutra, reason being the contents are mere physical and sexual contents. However, when a presentation on the contents on "Kāmasutra" were made and the sample group were made aware that, by practice of healthy Kāma, it creates a balanced environment and there are less conflicts psychologically. After the presentation, when the questions were asked, if you would like to read the "Kāmashastra" texts, the opinions had changed and 75% of people who had earlier reported were not interested to read "Kāmashastra" were now showing inclination to read it. This opinion survey clearly shows that, when right knowledge is provided and misconceptions are cleared, the choice of individual changes. In this case, we saw that the opinion about Kāmashastra changed and people were more inclined to read it, as it was going to aid them to balance and reduce the conflicts.

### Conclusion

Dharama-Artha-Kāma has equal importance in our Indian culture. Each one are complimenting in balanced growth of an individual. If misconceptions about Kāma are removed with proper knowledge, it will give opportunity to practice a balanced Trivarga, which in turn will help them minimize Individuals internal conflicts. Minimal conflicts means peaceful and happy living, which will lead to the step of Mokṣa which is the ultimate puruṣārthas as per hindu shastras.

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