



PURUSHARTH, ASHRAMS AND SANSKAR VYAVASTHA

Theory of Purusharth

- Purushartha is a Sanskrit word meaning the “**objects of human pursuit**” or “**goals of man**’.
- It refers to the four proper goals or aims of a human life: dharma, artha, kama and moksha:
 - **Dharma** is an honest and upright conduct or righteous action.
 - **Artha** means a righteous and honest pursuit of economic activities.
 - **Kama** is the fulfilment of one's legitimate desires.
 - **Moksha** is liberation, that is, absorption of the self into eternal bliss.
- These four goals are to be seen in the context of the four stages of life, the **ashrams**: each ashram relates to a different stage in life and has a goal associated with it.

Moksha, the ultimate goal

- Moksha is considered to be the ultimate goal for a human being. Second is Dharma; followed by Artha and Kama.
- Moksha or liberation is a term for denoting the end of the cycle of birth and rebirth. This cycle of birth and rebirth is known as **samsara**.
- One can reach the stage of moksha or liberation on the strength of one's deeds, his karma.

ASHRAMS

- ‘Ashram’ denotes a resting place or stage in the journey of life towards its ultimate goal of moksha or liberation.

Ashramas are four in number:

1. **Brahmacharya: The Stage of the Student:**

- In ancient India, a pupil had to live with his teacher, where he learned through a dialogue with the teacher. This stage of learning was known as Brahmacharyasrama.
 - In this phase, one acquired the knowledge of Dharma (the first purushartha).
2. **Grihastha: the Stage of the Married man, the House-holder:**
- In this Ashrama, the house-holder pursued Artha (wealth, the second purushartha) and Kama (legitimate desires, the third purushartha).
3. **Vanaprastha: the Stage of Retirement to Forest:**
- This was a stage preparatory to a complete renouncement of worldly relations.
 - In this stage, the individual gave up artha and kama; he left his near and dear ones, his family (kula), his village (grama); he abandoned his belongings and possessions.
 - In this stage, he occupied himself with the fourth purushartha, the Moksha.
4. **Sanyasa: the Stage of Complete Renunciation:**
- This was the last stage of life wherein the individual completely renounced his worldly relations, gave up all his attachments and became free from all obligations.
 - He engaged himself in search of true knowledge and of the self.
 - He brought himself face to face with the final aim of all existence, namely the moksha.

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