Salient Features of Indian Ethics

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Introduction

- India has a rich and diverse philosophical tradition dating back to ancient times. According to Radhakrishnan, the earlier Upanisads constitute "...the earliest philosophical compositions of the world."

- Traditionally, schools (Skt: Darshanas) of Indian philosophy are identified as orthodox (Skt: astika) or non-orthodox (Skt: nastika) depending on whether they regard the Veda as an infallible source of knowledge.
There are six schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy and three heterodox schools. The orthodox are Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva mimamsa and Vedanta. The Heterodox are Jain, Buddhist and materialist (Cārvāka). Indian ethical traditions have been one of the great repositories of moral thought in world philosophy whose insights have influenced early Greece, Europe, Asia, and the New World. Here we will study the Purusartha as a salient feature of Indian Ethics.
Puruṣārthas

- In Indian Ethics, puruṣārtha (Sanskrit पुरुषार्थ: "that which is sought by man; human purpose, aim, or end") refers to a goal, end or aim of human existence. There are generally considered to be four such puruṣārthas, namely:
  - Dharma: "(religious, social and/or moral) righteousness, both spiritual and ritual"
  - Artha: "(material and/or financial) prosperity as well as pursuit of meaning"
  - Kāma: "(material) pleasure"
  - Mokṣa: "(spiritual) liberation; or renunciation as well as detachment"
Origin

The notion that proper living entails the pursuit of four goals or ends first took shape in the literary traditions of the Dharmaśāstras and the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. Early texts treating the goals of human life commonly refer to kāma, artha and dharma as the "trivarga" or "three categories" of possible human pursuits. This is generally interpreted as indicating that the notion of mokṣa as one of the puruṣārthas is a product of a later age.
Verbal Meaning

The word 'purusartha' literally combined of two words 'purusa' and 'artha', which is understood in two ways:

1. 'Purusanam artha purusartha' means, 'what is the meaning of purusa that is purusartha' or that after getting which, purusa achieves its real meaning.

2. 'Purusaih arthyate iti purusartha' means, 'desired by purusa', therefore it is purusartha. With the above interpretation, variety of meanings get associated with the purusartha, which are found in Hindu Religio-Philosophical texts. These range from, 'motivations of human activities, human ends, individual urges, human needs, desire to be satisfied or ingredients of experience conducive to human fulfillments.

Now we will study it in details.
Dharma

- **Dharma** (Sanskrit: धर्म dhárma, Pali: धम्म dhamma; lit. *that which upholds, supports or maintains the regulatory order of the universe*) means *Law* or *Natural Law* and is a concept of central importance in Indian philosophy and religion. Dharma, in its very early meaning is equated to *rta* which in the form of natural law, is the maintenance of the order (Ethical order) of Universe. Dharma, etymologically, derived from the root, 'dhr', means, 'to uphold', 'to sustain' as in 'dharati dharyati dharma'.

- Dharma comes as the second most important concept in Hindu literature, after the concept of Reality. It is also an omnibus term which probably does not have any translation in English. Various meanings have been associated with dharma, with the progress of Indian civilization. Some of these are *rita*, *yajna*, *satya*, a characteristic, property, law, social code, conduct, morality, merits, virtues, rituals, and duty. What is unanimously accepted by modern interpreters of dharma that, among these meanings, the meaning 'duty' is found associated with dharma, since the very beginning of its use in literature and this meaning is central to the concept of dharma. Therefore, dharma consists of all meanings which are important and essential for sustenance and maintenance of mankind and Universe.
Artha

- **Artha** (Devanagari: अर्थ) is a Sanskrit term meaning "purpose, cause, motive, meaning, notion, wealth, economy or gain".

- It refers to the idea of material prosperity. In Hinduism, artha is one of the four goals of life, known as purushartha. It is considered to be a noble goal as long as it follows the dictates of Vedic morality. The concept includes achieving widespread fame, garnering wealth and having an elevated social standing. It is the second of the four purushartha, the other three being dharma (righteousness), kama (physical or emotional pleasure) and moksha (liberation). Artha is one of the dharmas (duties) of a person in the second stage of life, the householder stage, and during this a person must accumulate as much wealth as possible, without being greedy, to help and support his family and to be able to give to noble charitable works.
Kāma

- Kāma (Sanskrit, Pali; Devanagari: काम) is often translated from Sanskrit as sexual desire, sexual pleasure, sensual gratification, sexual fulfillment, or eros, but can more broadly mean desire, wish, passion, longing, pleasure of the senses, the aesthetic enjoyment of life, affection, or love, without sexual connotations.

- In Hinduism, kāma is regarded as the third of the four goals of life (purusharthaśtas, the others being duty (dharma), worldly status (artha) and salvation (moksha). Kama-deva is the personification of this. Kama-rupa is a subtle body or aura composed of desire, while Kama-loka is the realm this inhabits, particularly in the afterlife. In the context of the four goals of life, kāma refers to mental and intellectual fulfillment in accordance to dharma.
Moksha

- Within Indian religions, **moksha** (Sanskrit: मोक्ष mokṣa) or **mukti** (Sanskrit: मुक्ति), literally "release" (both from a root *muc* "to let loose, let go"), is the liberation from *samsara* and the concomitant suffering involved in being subject to the cycle of repeated death and reincarnation or rebirth.

- It is highly probable that the concept of **moksha** was first developed in India by Aryan people whose spiritual ideas greatly influenced later Indian religious thought. Buddhism and Jainism are continuations of this tradition, and the early Upanishadadic movement was influenced by it. Reincarnation was likely adopted from this religious culture by Brahmin orthodoxy. Brahmins wrote the earliest recorded scriptures containing these ideas in the early Upanishads. Except Charvakas all schools of Indian Philosophy consider it.
Reference

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Conclusion

- Here we study the conception of Purusartha as an important conception of Indian Ethics. A great discussion is available on this notion in many texts and on internet.