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Part I

The four aims of life

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Introduction

> "The fact that I have affected the thought and practice of our times does not make me fit to give expression to the philosophy that may lie behind it. To give a philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon must be reserved for men like you."[1]

Harmony is the coming together of the different elements that constitute a coherent whole. Gandhi's philosophy is made up of different elements. That is why it has been interpreted from different angles. Some treat it primarily as a political theory. Others approach it as a religious philosophy of great contemporary relevance. Still others see it as an original theory of conflict resolution and non-violence. There are those who regard it as containing ideas extremely relevant for both economic development and for the maintenance of a sustainable economy. Finally there are those who find in it significant ideas on the relationship of art to society.

There is of course a great deal of truth in what these interpretations have to say. Taken individually, each gives an in-depth, but unavoidably partial understanding of the whole. The fact is that individual themes in Gandhi's philosophy make full sense only when they are seen in their relationship to one another and to the whole. It is the reality of this interaction that needs to be understood. It is not enough to juxtapose a series of different Gandhis – the political, the religious, the ethical, or any other. It is not enough to know that Gandhi teaches non-violence. To know his doctrine of non-violence really well one has to know how it interacts with his position on war or his theory of the state and the relations between states. Likewise it is not enough to know that he put his religious insights into socially and politically beneficial practice. To know his religious philosophy really well we have to know how it comports with secularism that he also professed. And so on with the other major

[1] M. K. Gandhi to S. Radhakrishnan, 16 September 1934, cited in S. Gopal, *Radhakrishnan: A Biography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 138.

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themes of his philosophy. The point is that there is an inner dynamism that brings the diverse elements into a fruitful relationship with one another. And it is necessary to understand the nature of this inner dynamism if we are to understand his philosophy accurately and fully.

While specialists tend to focus on specific elements of Gandhi's thought, it is often the generalist – apart from the historian, of course – who catches a glimpse of the whole. This is the case, for example, with the assessment made by Sir Ernest Barker, a Cambridge political philosopher and a personal friend of the Mahatma. He saw different elements meeting in him and reinforcing one another. There was the St. Francis, "vowed to the simple life of poverty, in harmony with all creation and in love with all created things." There was the St. Thomas Aquinas, "able to sustain high argument and to follow the subtleties of thought in all their windings." And then there was the statesman, "who could come down from mountain tops, to guide with shrewd advice transactions in the valley." Finally there was the bridge that connected the Indian tradition of "devout and philosophic religion" and the Western tradition of "civil and political liberty in the life of the community." "The mixture was the essence." He could mix "the spiritual with the temporal, and could be at the same time true to both." "What he was to the world, and what he could do for the world, depended on his being more things than one."[2]

"Being more things than one" is a label that fits Gandhi well. Any study of his thought that aspires to be comprehensive is bound to expose the student to the comparative perspective that it provides. The ancient and the modern, the Indian and the Western perspectives jointly illumine the substance of his thought. The question is how the different elements come together and constitute a coherent whole. This book attempts to answer this question. It uses a framework of analysis that does justice to the basic unity of his practical philosophy. Gandhi was not a philosopher in the normal sense of that term, much less a system builder. But a philosophy does underlie his thought and actions. He was aware of this, though not willing to expound systematically the underlying philosophy. He wisely left the task of exposition and interpretation to the philosophers themselves. That was the point of his letter to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan cited at the beginning of this Introduction.

This letter is of great value to every serious interpreter of Gandhi. For it tells us that non-philosophers like Gandhi often work from certain basic philosophic principles. The fact that he was not a philosopher in the

[2] Sir Ernest Barker, "Gandhi, as Bridge and Reconciler," in S. Radhakrishnan (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work* (Bombay: Jaico, 1995), pp. 41–42.

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formal sense need not therefore inhibit his interpreters from looking for the underlying philosophy. By the same token, there is no excuse for not looking for the philosophic underpinnings of his thought. In the history of human thought there have been several non-philosophers who produced important bodies of philosophical ideas. Machiavelli is a well-known example from the West. The crucial issue is whether in interpreting such thinkers we can find the right interpretive key, the key that fits the available data. I believe that in Gandhi's case such a key is available. It is the Indian theory of the purusharthas (the aims of life). Apart from opening the vast storehouse of Gandhian ideas, it also enables us to enter a truly Indian intellectual edifice.

This theory is of course one of the foundational theories of the entire Indian civilization.[3] It underpins the basic ethics of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Without an understanding of this theory one cannot grasp the ethical nuances of the *Pancatantra*, that celebrated fictional counterpart to the *Arthasastra*.[4]

The concept of purushartha has three related meanings. First, it means any human striving. Secondly, it refers to human striving directed towards overcoming fate and karma. And thirdly, it refers to any one of the four canonically recognized aims of life, viz., dharma (ethics and religion), artha, (wealth and power), kama (pleasure), and moksha (liberation from *samsara*, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth).[5] The bulk of our argument will be taken up with the third meaning, even although the other two meanings also, as we shall see, will receive their due attention.

Etymologically the term purushartha, made up of purusha (spirit) and artha (for the sake of), carries the literal meaning of "that which is pursued for the sake of the spirit or the immortal soul." In Indian philosophical anthropology humans are seen as composites of body and spirit. It is the purusha that provides the spiritual and moral "foundation" (*adhistan*) to the human personality. Accordingly, human values are seen, ultimately, as those that are pursued for the sake of the purusha. Put simply, the pursuit of purushartha is what gives human activities their basic meaning and purpose. Not that the body and its interests do not have their own internal structure and relatively autonomous goals, but

[3] For a brief history of the concept of purusharthas see Gavin Flood, "The Meaning and Context of the *Purusharthas*," in J. Lipner (ed.), *The Fruits of Our Desiring: An Enquiry into the Ethics of the Bhagavad Gita for Our Times* (Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 1997), pp. 12–18.

[4] See Patrick Olivelle (trans.), *Pancatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[5] A. Sharma, *The Purusharthas: A Study in Hindu Axiology* (East Lansing, MI: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1982), p. 1, and Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899), p. 637.

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that, in moral and philosophic terms, such goals acquire their full *human* significance only when they retain a reference to the immortal purusha. Any human pursuit that deliberately excludes a reference, however remote, to the purusha is considered *pro tanto* not beneficial to human well being.

It is no wonder that those who wish to understand the Indian civilization as a whole find in the theory of the purusharthas a very convenient tool for analysis and communication. For example, William Theodore de Bary's *Sources of Indian Tradition*, a well-known college text, uses "the four ends of man" as its framework of analysis of Indian thought.[6] Heinrich Zimmer's *Philosophies of India* does something similar.[7] He groups Indian philosophical thought under two headings: "philosophies of time" and "philosophies of eternity." Under the first heading he deals with the three "temporal" purusharthas of artha, dharma and kama. The masterworks of these purusharthas are, respectively, the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, the *Dharmasastra* of Manu, and the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana. And under the second heading he deals with moksha, the fourth purushartha. Historically it received canonical recognition later than did the other three. But it soon acquired preeminence over them. As many as six systems of philosophy – Nyaya, Vaisesika, Yoga, Samkya, Mimamsa and Vedanta – were invented to do justice to this one purushartha. And, as if to underline the contemporary relevance of the theory, the Centre d'études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, Paris, has entitled its annual publication *Collectio Purushartha*.

The mutual relationship of the four aims

The question of the mutual relationship between the four aims 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 Indian classical thought, and it continues to be raised even today. The *Arthasastra*, for example, advises the good ruler to devote himself or herself equally to dharma, artha and kama, 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.[8] If one's duty (*svadharma*) is pursued

[6] W. T. de Bary (ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 203–366.
[7] H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: Meridian Books, 1961), pp. 87–464.
[8] R. P. Kangle (trans.), *The Kautiliya Arthasastra* (2nd edn, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), bk. I, ch. 7, vv. 4–7, p. 14.

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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."[9] The *Dharmasastra* 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 kama 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.[10] The aggregate of the three would lead to moksha.[11] Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* also noted the existence of competing views on the subject. The prescribed procedure was that dharma should have precedence over artha, and artha over kama. 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, kama should have precedence over the rest. Vatsyayna's own advice was in favor 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."[12]

Adding moksha to the existing canon of three, the so-called triad – dharma, artha, and kama – created a problem of its own. It was that the triad was held by some to be unable to contribute directly to the attainment of moksha. The claims of the *sramanic* or the "renouncer" movements – Brahminical, Buddhist, and Jain – were largely responsible for this. We see the Buddha, the *sramana* (renouncer) par excellence, renouncing his princely status, and even family ties, for the sake of attaining nirvana. As a result, in Buddhism, as in ascetic Brahminism and Jainism, artha and kama came to be marginalized to the point of being treated as negative values. At best artha was conflated with dharma, as in the case of Asoka the Great, the Buddhist emperor. His famous edicts sought to establish the reign of dharma at the expense of artha.

The radical separation of moksha and nirvana from the other purusharthas had had disastrous consequences for Indian civilization taken as a whole. The achievements of Kautilya, for example, were rendered nugatory and, as a result, Indian political philosophy stagnated for nearly two millennia.[13] The great thinkers of India, including Sankara and

[9] Ibid., bk. I, ch. 3, v. 14. Kangle interprets the term "endless bliss" as meaning moksha, not just heaven. Ibid., p. 8, n. 14.
[10] W. Doniger and B. K. Smith (trans.), *The Laws of Manu* (London: Penguin, 1991), ch. 2, v. 224.
[11] Ibid., ch. 6, vv. 79, 81, and 85.
[12] W. Doniger and S. Kakar (trans.), *Vatsyayana Kamasutra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), bk. I, ch. 2, vv. 14 and 15, and bk. 1, ch. 2, v. 41.
[13] For a brief analysis of the impact of the *sramana* movement on the purusharthas, see Flood, "The Meaning and Context of the Purusharthas," pp. 22–23.

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Ramanuja, supported the ascendancy of moksha over all the other purusharthas.

The trend continued even after the nineteenth century, despite Raja Ram Mohan Roy's (1772–1833) effort to reverse it. Swaminarayan (1781–1830) and Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–86) lent their support to the world-renouncing and artha-devaluing approach to moksha.[14]

The ascendancy of moksha is so great that even today some of the major discussions on the relationship between the purusharthas often come down to a discussion of the relationship between dharma and moksha, as if the other purusharthas do not matter. For an example we need to look no farther than the debate between D. H. H. Ingalls and J. A. B. van Buitenen on the subject. Van Buitenen held dharma and moksha to be incompatible. Moksha was the release from the entire realm governed by dharma. The idea was that "the world and phenomena," being transitory, could never be an ultimately valid goal, that there was lesser truth in creation than in the principle or person from which creation originated.[15]

Ingalls on the other hand found dharma and moksha "to have been usually harmonized within one single religious path." The two arose in different milieus, and the majority of Hindus attempted "to harmonize" the two. To those who accepted the goal of moksha, it was a goal beyond dharma. The harmonizers regarded the two "as points along a single journey, a journey for which the viaticum was discipline and self-training."[16] The conflict was the exception rather than the rule. It was "the monastic disharmonizers," as Ingalls called them, (among them Nagarjuna, Sankara and Vallabha), who insisted on "the contradiction" between the two.[17]

In the late twentieth century, however, the scope of the discourse broadened to include all four purusharthas. But disagreements still persist on the question of whether the four constitute a system of oppositions or one of relative harmony. Louis Dumont and A. K. Ramanujan, for example, defend a theory of opposition.

Dumont, in his *Homo Hierarchicus*, first of all radically separates moksha from the rest. Even within the rest, i.e., the triad, a hierarchical relationship exists. Dharma, artha, and kama represent a hierarchy of ends – moral universalism, calculating egoism, and immediate satisfaction, respectively. Each is accorded legitimacy. At the same time, each is

[14] Sharma, *The Purusharthas: A Study in Hindu Axiology*, pp. 30–32.
[15] J. van Buitenen, "Dharma and Moksha," *Philosophy East and West*, 7 (1957), p. 37.
[16] D. H. H. Ingalls, "Dharma and Moksha," *Philosophy East and West*, 7 (1957), p. 46.
[17] Ibid., p. 48, n. 20.

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opposed to the other, though not absolutely. A hierarchical opposition exists when an "inferior" goal is pursued only when a "superior" goal does not intervene. Thus, in case of conflict, kama should yield to artha, and artha to dharma. If this rule were followed, the triad would work as a system of hierarchical opposition. However, between the triad and moksha, no positive relationship is possible, as the latter requires the radical renunciation of the former. In the end, any attempt to bring together the four into a system will only mask the heterogeneity that exists between moksha and the rest.[18]

Dumont appears to be oblivious of Kautilya's principle of mutuality (*anyonya-anubaddham*), which should relate the four to each other. That is why he is forced to posit opposition where mutuality should prevail. This faulty concept of the relationship between the purusharthas forces him to make a faulty analysis of Gandhi's philosophy. He sees two Gandhis – the politician and the *sannyasi* (ascetic) – co-existing without any internal integration. It was as if the two Gandhis were unable to communicate with each other. To the British, Gandhi appeared to be a political representative of Indians, to the Indians he appeared to be a holy man.[19] At the root of this falsification of Gandhi is Dumont's inability to see what Gandhi was really attempting to do, namely to reconstitute the system of values of Indian civilization and to rehabilitate the principle of mutuality especially between artha and moksha.

A. K. Ramanujan, in his turn, favors what he calls a theory of "successive encompassment" to explain the internal relationship of the purusharthas. Dharma, artha and kama form "concentric nests" (*kosas* or sheaths) formed from the center – the individual. In so far as they are concentric nests they are relational in their values. The individual needs to follow them in succession. Moksha, however is not part of the system of nests, for it is "release from all relations." *Sannyasa* (the final stage in life), writes Ramanujan, "cremates" all one's past and present relations.[20] Moksha for him is pure isolation, *kaivalyam*. Once more, disharmony between values is the end result of this particular interpretation of the theory of the purusharthas.

[18] L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, translated by M. Sainsbury, L. Dumont, and B. Gulati (rev. edn, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 271–74.
[19] Ibid., p. 328.
[20] A. K. Ramanujan, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" in M. Marriott (ed.), *India Through Hindu Categories* (New Delhi: Sage, 1990), pp. 51, 54.

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From opposition towards harmony

The need to go beyond the negative attitude fostered by these "disharmonizers" is recognized by many Indian thinkers today. For them it is not enough to *restate* what the last two millennia thought of what the relationship of the triad to nirvana or moksha had been. For them it is necessary to rethink the whole theory of the purusharthas. No one has expressed the need for this with greater conviction and intellectual authority than has Pandurang Vaman Kane, the author of the monumental *History of Dharmasastra*. One of the general conclusions that he has reached is that the radical separation of the spiritual from the political, the economic from the ethical had cost Indian civilization dearly. He lays much of the blame at the feet of the *acharyas* (Indian religious philosopher-saints) for placing "too much emphasis on other worldliness and Vedanta," and for not placing "equal or greater emphasis" on the importance of the active life. He is saddened not to find an Indian Alberuni[21] in the eleventh century who would inquire into the reasons why Indians did not form a permanent state for the whole of India, why they did not develop manufacturing and industries, and why they were unable to resist successfully external aggression. Indian intellectuals were mostly engaged in "mental gymnastics" about Logic, Vedanta, Poetics and similar subjects, giving little attention to the means of removing the weaknesses and the defects of the country's political and economic systems.[22] The starting point of such rethinking should include a new understanding of the meaning of the theory of the purusharthas.

Several students of Indian thought have contributed to this rethinking. The work of the philosopher R. Sundara Rajan has been quite innovative here. His knowledge of Western phenomenological thought enabled him to see the purusharthas as "modes of being in the world," or "the grounds of the possibility of our humanity." It is the purusharthas in their "simultaneity" that distinguish us as human. To sunder one from the other is to negate it as a purushartha. Kama, for instance, without the other three would be animal impulse, but with them, it would be a form of being human. What makes kama a human value is its mediation by the other three.[23] And so on with the other three.

[21] Abu Rihan Muhammad Alberuni (973–1048), the celebrated Muslim savant who wrote a cultural history of India. For more information see chapter 2, note 12.

[22] P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. V (2nd edn, Poona: Bhandarkar Institute, 1977), part 2, pp. 1620–23. For his exposition of the meaning of the *purusharthas* see ibid., pp. 1626–32.

[23] R. Sundara Rajan, "The *Purusharthas* in the Light of Critical Theory," *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 7 (1979–80), p. 343.

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Rajan also sees a connection between the purusharthas and constitutive reason. They are not apart from reason. They exemplify the fourfold way in which reason constitutes our humanity.[24] While each purushartha has its own "specific autonomy," each is at the same time "oriented" to the others; and it is this relationship to the other that makes each one of them a distinctly human orientation.[25] Each expresses the totality from the point of view of one of the purusharthas. The connection between them is not merely logical and empirical: "they have the kind of necessity which synthetic a priori connections have in the Kantian scheme."[26]

One outcome of this approach to the purusharthas is the rejection of any radical separation between moksha and the rest. Daya Krishna, for example, sees the need for "building a new theory of the purusharthas which would take into account the diverse seekings of man, and do justice to them."[27] In Mircea Eliade's view, the purusharthas are "integrative": an integrated life involves the pursuit of all the four goals.[28] Arvind Sharma recognizes the need of contemporary Hindu culture "to justify itself by the doctrine of the purusharthas; if it is found wanting in the area of artha, for instance, then it is to this area that creative thinkers within Hinduism must turn their attention."[29] Gavin Flood sees the relevance of the theory of the purusharthas not only for modern India but also for the modern world. It lies in "their recognition of pluralism and the tolerance which that recognition entails." The theory can also act as "cultural critique" of modern civilization, which seems to be too preoccupied with wealth, power and pleasure, and too little with art, aesthetics, and the spiritual life.[30] Klaus Klostermaier's comparative study of the ideas of liberation (moksha) in Sankara and emancipation in Jürgen Habermas, has enabled him to weigh the relative merits and defects of each of these thinkers. The defect in Sankara was to argue that liberation always and everywhere would require "uninvolvement" in the social, economic and processes in which the seeker after liberation found himself or herself. The defect in Habermas is to identify emancipation with emancipation from ideology and complete faith in science and modern psychoanalysis. What is needed is a broadening of the socio-economic base of the

[24] Ibid., p. 345.
[25] R. Sundara Rajan, "Approaches to the Theory of the *Purusharthas*: Husserl, Heidegger and Ricœur," *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, 6 (1988–89), p. 135.
[26] Ibid., pp. 137–38.
[27] D. Krishna, *Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 205.
[28] M. Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol. VI, p. 345.
[29] Sharma, *The Purusharthas: A Study in Hindu Axiology*, p. 40.
[30] Flood, "The Meaning and Context of the *Purusharthas*," p. 26.

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