



Purusarthas: The Value Paradigms of Human Life (The *Bhagavat Gita* Perspective)

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Abstract :

In the context of human life, the Hindu scriptures have suggested four cardinal values of life, such as, dharma, artha, kāma, and moksa. These four cardinal values are called Purusārthas or the fundamental goals of human life. Human life is empirical and therefore, contextual. Understanding values and living with such values invite the dilemma in value paradigms because man lives through contextual contingencies. The dialectics of `dharma and adharma`, `artha and anartha`, `kāma and niskāma`, and `moksa and bandha` are to be understood in the context of ever-changing human life. In this paper, we shall discuss how the dilemma in value paradigms is resolved by the dialectical understanding of the apparent opposites in the context of practical human life. Dharma is a value paradigm (Purusārtha) and related to other Purusārthas such as artha, kāma, and moksa. In the schemata of Purusārtha, artha and kāma are empirical values and moksa is the trans-mundane value (Paramapurusārtha). When artha and kāma are regulated by dharma one attains the ultimate state of freedom which cannot be expressed through any empirical mode of experience. Dharma is discussed from several categories, such as dharma-artha, dharma-kāma, vastu-dharma, jaiva-dharma, mānava-dharma, āshrama-dharma, varna-dharma, swadharma, raja-dharma, prajā-dharma, guna-dharma, and so on, from an empirical standpoint.

Key Words: Purusārthas, Paradigms, Dharma, Human life

Introduction:

Human life is value-centric. Consciousness of value paradigms as well as value conflicts is a human possibility. Man makes and breaks the rules. This is the irony of the human predicament. The reason for such a predicament is the 'reason' itself which can be used and misused by man. In the context of human life, the Hindu scriptures have suggested

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four cardinal values of life, such as *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *moksa*. These four cardinal values are called *Purusārthas* or the fundamental goals of human life. But the interesting fact is that these fundamental values or goals of life do not suffer from fundamentalism or absolutism. Human life is empirical and therefore, contextual. ‘Understanding values’ and ‘living with such values’ invite the dilemma in value paradigms because man lives through contextual contingencies. This dilemma can be removed by the dialectical understanding of the value paradigms. The dialectics of ‘*dharma* and *adhharma*’, ‘*artha* and *anartha*’, ‘*kāma* and *niskāma*’, and ‘*moksa* and *bandha*’ are to be understood in the context of ever changing human life. The same action may be judged right in one context and wrong in another context. This invites the conflict of *dharma* and *adhharma*. Similarly, the ‘*kāma*’ or desire is understood as the root cause of human suffering in one context and as *Purusārtha* in another context. *Artha* is necessary for human existence but the same *artha* becomes *anartha* if it is not pursued through the principle of righteousness. Regarding *moksa*, there is the conflict between ‘freedom in life’ and ‘freedom from life’. In this paper, we shall discuss how the dilemma in value paradigms is resolved by the dialectical understanding of the apparent opposites in the context of practical human life.

Dharma and Adharma

Dharma is the principle of righteousness. *Adharma* is devoid of this principle of righteousness. *Dharma* is a value-paradigm (*Purusārtha*) and related with other *Purusārthas* such as *artha*, *kāma* and *moksa*. In the *Bhagavat Gītā* the secret of dharma is said to be ensconced in the innermost being of a person.¹ *Dharma* is not to be viewed as merely performing a regulatory function in relation to the pursuits of wealth and pleasure (*artha* and *kāma*). *Dharma* has an application from a higher consciousness of order, interrelatedness, harmony and unity. Thus the pursuit of *dharma* in the empirical pragmatic life becomes indispensably instrumental (*sāadhanā*) to the supreme spiritual ideal of *Moksa*. Perfection is attained only when mind remains completely immune to the limiting influence of the *gunas*.² Righteous conduct can be taken as an unfailing source of morality because the laws of righteousness (*dharma*) remain as mere abstraction unless and until they get crystallized in form of righteous conduct (*sadācāra*).³ *Guna* together with *karma* determines how one thinks and acts in real life situations.⁴ In the schemata of *Purusārtha*, *artha* and *kāma* are empirical values and *moksa* is the trans-mundane value (*Paramapurūsārtha*). *Dharma* is the bridge

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between these two value paradigms. When *artha* and *kāma* are regulated by dharma one attains the ultimate state of freedom which cannot be expressed through any empirical mode of experience. One achieves the ultimate state of freedom, which cannot be described through any empirical mode of experience, when *artha* and *kāma* are controlled by dharma. In this situation, dharma plays two roles: trans-empirical or categorical and empirical. Dharma is discussed from several categories, such as *dharma-artha*, *dharma-kāma*, *vastu-dharma*, *jaiva-dharma*, *mānava-dharma*, *āshrama-dharma*, *varna-dharma*, *swadharma*, *raja-dharma*, *prajā-dharma*, *guna-dharma*, and so on, from an empirical standpoint. From a trans-mundane or categorical standpoint, *dharma* is viewed as the regulative order that is unconditional and universal regardless of typical differences. It transcends all categories. *Dharma* can be both a categorical and a empirical imperative. According to empirical research, the *dharma* adheres to contextual requirements that change from category to category. However, from a trans-empirical standpoint, dharma adheres to an unwavering command that is independent of all classifications and contextual factors. *Dharma* is a categorical need as an unwavering moral code. Both the categorical and contextual paradigms are viewed as moral from their respective perspectives. In the absence of contextual applicability, categorical paradigms are worthless, and the converse is true for contextual paradigms. Bradley's concept of "My station and my duty" and The *Bhagavat Gita's* concept of *Svadharma* have both been used to discuss how these two dialectical possibilities of moral order might be reconciled.

Svadharma is both contextual and categorical. *Svadharma* is categorical since it contains the dharma-paradigm. *Svadharma* is contextual since it is context-specific. Both the cosmic and moral orders apply to every situation. The context is the actual setting in which moral principles are put into practice. The *dharma*-paradigm is not undermined by the contextual exceptions because every exception is also a norm. The *dharma*-paradigm is only manifested when it is applied in different settings. *Svadharma* is contextual because the *dharma*-paradigm must be applied in the concrete situations of everyday life. Water naturally flows down, but since it is used for human purposes, it may be made to flow up by using a motor. While telling lies might be beneficial in some circumstances, revealing the truth is the dharma paradigm. Even though taking someone's life is violent, it is nevertheless honourable on the battlefield. The moot question may surprise us whether war is an act of violence or non-violence. In the context of the *Bhagavat Gita*, war is an act of non-violence if it is for the

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protection of *dharma* and betterment of the people (*lokasangraha*). Rather, to be reluctant to fight in the right occasion is a sign of violence of *dharma*. In other words, not fighting in the right occasion for protecting *dharma* is really *adharma*. Hence *dharma* and *adharma* are judged in pretext of the context. *Svadharmā*, or a person's *dharma* in a particular situation, is to concretize the abstract *dharma*-paradigm. If all of the differences are combined and held to their respective rules, the Unity will be possible. The only way that the social order is kept in place is because each and every member of society works together to do so. The universe is made regimented by its nucleus.

While taking into account both empirical and trans-empirical viewpoints, the notion of *dharma* can be approached holistically without being influenced by dogmatic one-sided approaches. Without any contradictions or illogical leaps, *Dharma* is categorical and empirical imperative. Man can comprehend the overarching unity of all diversity because he is logical. Man must coexist with and through many social and religious institutions because of his social and religious nature. Man has his own space for his personal social and religious activities. The contextual disparities are fundamentally social and religious. Context determines the empirical differences. A specific station of duty (*Svadharmā*) and religious setting make up the context (personal belief). The context or circumstance in which something is evaluated determines whether it is *dharma* or *adharma*. *Dharma* is contextual imperative in this sense. But because it is the fundamental or universal value, *dharma* transcends all social and religious categorizations. Man is identified with the principle of righteousness in the state of categorical transcendence, regardless of contextual disparities. Due to his categorical prejudice and worry for his family and his realm, *Arjuna* was perplexed on the battlefield. However, combat on *Kuruksetra's* battlefield had the purpose of defending *dharma*. It is important to confront anyone who commits *adharma*, and this is made feasible when soldiers on the battlefield are able to put aside all socio-religious prejudices. Therefore, in human life, both the cardinal values and the contextual imperatives have importance and meaning. *Dharma* is the foundation of social order and prompts us to consider the concepts of *svadharmā* and *paradharmā* found in the *Bhagavat Gitā*. The practice of *Svadharmā* is unconditional and without conditions. One must act, but the activity must be in accordance with one's *Svadharmā* for it to be morally acceptable. It is also true that obligations must be met regardless of the results. The knowledgeable comprehend this

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Karma Yoga dialectics secret and never mix contextual dharma with universal *dharma*, between contextual disparities and categorical transcendence. When one is established in the state of *Niskāmakarma*, this is feasible. When it is founded in the state of *Naiskarmya*, this is conceivable. When one has a desire for the welfare of everyone, this is achievable (*lokasangraha*). In light of the *Bhagavat Gitā*, this is demonstrated that the relative cogency of the laws of *karma* and *niskāmakarma* before demonstrating the categorical imperativeness of *dharma* as both a moral paradigm (righteousness) and as a contextual (socio-religious) paradigm.

Artha and Anartha

For human life, *artha* is unavoidable. In both the limited and broad senses, the word "*artha*" refers to money or wealth. The term "*artha*" refers to everything that is necessary for our empirical existence, which includes both our material and mental worlds of existence. We fight for everything we need to survive, including food, clothing, water, air, a good environment, etc. In a similar vein, in order to state our psychic appetite, we must comprehend the meaning of a word. As mental necessities for our existence, we require social approval, self-esteem, inspiration, education, etc. Our existence is made efficient and effective by *artha*, an existential compulsion. Both worldly wealth and a thorough comprehension of life are implied by *artha* as *purusārtha*. Any resource that supports our existence by realising our *kāmanā* is *artha*, and is therefore legitimately recognised as a value paradigm. The psyche's quest of worldly wealth and moral uprightness is known as "human desire," or "*kāmanā*." There is no end to human aspirations. A want fuels another, and so on in an endless circle of desire. All current and potential desires can be grouped together under three universal aspirations, such as the aspirations for *artha*, *dharma*, and *moksa*. Our need for *artha* motivates us to use all of our methods of survival. Our desire for *dharma* motivates us to lead morally upright and ideal lives.

Kāmanā for *artha* makes us think that *artha* is meaningful having survival value and *kāmanā* for *moksa* makes us think that the same *artha* is meaningless. Blind pursuit of the more accumulation having possessive attitude leads to *anartha* or worthless consequences. *Artha* has survival value, but not only value of life. The same *artha* that supports our existence becomes *anartha* if pursued without *dharma*. The greedy people run after *artha* at the cost of their peace of mind. Hence one should learn the art of *aparigraha* or non-

possessiveness. *Artha* is not the ultimate value of life and therefore, it cannot give us *ānanda* and fulfillment. So, one should be free from the bondage of *artha*. The bondage of *artha* is the feeling or belief that *artha* is the only value of life. The sense of freedom makes us free from this bondage and regulates the *kāmanā* for the *artha* by *dharma* or the principle of righteousness and perfection. A free man can think that *artha* is a ‘means of living’, not ‘the very end of life’. This type of thinking will inspire one to be restrained from bad means of existence (*artha* by *adharma*) and this brings perfection in both individual and social life. *Artha-kāmanā* is necessary for living life and *artha-moksa* is necessary for living a better life, a free life, a fulfilled life. *Artha* should not become a liability. The pursuit of *artha* becomes a veritable disvalue when it hinders the attainment of the highest goal.⁵

Kāma and Nishkāma

Kāma, or desire, is acknowledged as one of the *purusārtha* or the paradigms of value and is also seen as the source of all misery. *Kāma* can also be interpreted to mean attachment. Because attachment is necessary for work to be done, Indian scriptures do not entirely dismiss it. Our attachment must be sincere and justified. Our sense of detachment should be used to further our attachment. The first line of *Isopanisad*, "*Tena tyaktena bhunjithā*,"⁶ makes this observation and advises that one should be attached but with a sense of detachment. According to the *Bhagavat Gitā*, *Arjuna* had an incorrect attachment to his sorrow (*visāda*), which was unexpected of a wise person. The challenge at hand is how we may achieve the double standards by assuming *kāma* as the primary source of pain and the cycle of life while yet believing in *Purusārtha*, or the value of life. For one to reach *Nirvana*, according to the *Buddha*, one must destroy all *kāmanā*, or passion. According to the *Bhagavat Gitā*, *kāma*, which derives from *Prakriti- Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas*, is the primary source of bondage and is hence condemned. The results of an action that one should give up in order to achieve liberation are referred to as *kāma* in *Karma Yoga*.

Kāma is seen as a value-paradigm in the schemata of *Purusārthas*. *Nishkāma* in the *Bhagavat Gitā* does not imply the absence of *kāmanā* or complete abandonment of *kāmanā*. Instead, the word "*nishkāma*" refers to the ultimate goal of any action, which is *lokasangraha*, or the good of the whole. The *Bhagavat Gitā's* teachings on *nishkāmākarma* provide an answer to the dialectical tension that existed between *kāma* as the intense desire

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and *kāma* as the value-paradigm. All current and potential desires can be grouped together under three universal aspirations, such as the aspirations for *artha*, *dharma*, and *moksa*. Our need for *artha* motivates us to use all of our methods of survival. Our desire for *dharma* motivates us to lead morally upright and ideal lives. We lead a life of renunciation because of our desire for *moksa*. Man cannot exist if he has no *kāmanā*, or desires. It is *kāmanā*, or desire, that fuels our curiosity about how, why, and what. Inquisitiveness to know how, why, and what has made science, philosophy, religion, art, and literature possible. Therefore, *kāmanā* is a broad and positive word that can legitimately be interpreted as a value-paradigm. Humans have the right to *kāmanā* for *dharma*. *Dharma* consciousness is a natural urge in man.

Nature of a desire is determined by the source of desire and the objects of its fulfillment.⁶ Our mind monitors and helps to satiate the desires. When mind is misguided by lower propensities, it longs for and runs after the pleasurable (*preya*) and when it aspires for something subtle, it moves towards the preferable (*sreya*). Mind has the natural tendency to move in the direction of the pleasurable (*preya*).⁷ The insatiable cravings of the senses, the unending quest of the mind are symptomatic of the longing of the Self to attain Infinity and be restored in its native state. So, it is necessary that the physical and psychic are guided by the dictate of the Spiritual. *Dharma* is the principle by which the physico-psychic longings are harmonized and channelized towards the goal, which is a state where all desires are fulfilled (*āptakāma*) and therefore, there is nothing to be desired.⁸ If there is any desire, it is the desire for knowing the self (*ātmakāma*).⁹

. *Niskāmākarma* shows the method of transforming ordinary *karma* into the case of *Akarma* and indirectly prevents one from doing *Vikarma*. When one is established in the state of *Niskāmākarma*, it ultimately takes one to the state of *naiskarmya*. *Niskāma* is cognized as a qualified *kāma* installed with five fundamental attributes. Firstly, *kāma* should be free from the sense of agency (*kartābhava*). Secondly, *kāma* should be free from attachment for the results or consequences, favourable or unfavourable. Thirdly, *kāma* should be inclined for the collective well-being (*lokasangraha*). Fourthly, *kāma* should be executed by free will or rational will. And finally, *kāma* should be guided by the principle of righteousness (*dharma*). The ego arises when we are ignorant and forgetful of our spiritual nature. When this ignorance is ended, there is the experience of the infinite bliss of the primordial

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Consciousness. When desires are absent, the thought-breeding ends. When thoughts are dried up, actions, which are the parade of thoughts, are no more. This state is called actionlessness – *Naishkarmyasiddhi*. An intellect that is attached to sensuous things of the world outside knows no peace within itself. In case of *Arjuna*, his tall talks of detachment and renunciation were false urges of escapism paraded as an angelic urge. His *Sanyāsa* arose out of his attachment to his kith and kin, while true *sanyāsa* must arise out of detachment. Mind is the seat of all vanities of agency, like ‘I am the doer’, ‘I am the enjoyer’, ‘I am the knower’, ‘I am my mind’, ‘I am my intellect’, and so on. These are all instances of egocentric attachment.

The Bhagavat Gita observes,

*Asaktabuddhiḥ sarvatra jitātmā vigataspr̥haḥ,
Naiṣkamryasiddhiṁ paramāṁ sannyāsenādhigachhanti.¹⁰*

He whose intellect is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self, from whom desire has fled, he, through renunciation, attains the Supreme state of freedom from action.

Moksa as Value-paradigm:

Longing for liberation is known as *Mumuksutvam*.¹¹ This is the highest value of life. *Dharma* only shows the path of righteousness, but it has no role in choosing the right path. If one is not free, one can be involved in ‘*dhrama sankata*’. *Darma sankata* is a situation when two dialectical value paradigms or two righteous principles go parallel and claim to be right from different perspectives. In the *Bhagavat Gitā*, ‘to fight or not to fight’ were both right choices for *Arjuna*. Fighting is *dharma* when the very *dharma* is to be established. Fighting is *adharma* when it is fought out of anger or animosity and for any specific interest. So, the same action is both *dharma* and *adharma* depending upon the situation or context. It depends on the question if it is for greater interest or not. *dharma sankata* leaves a man in the cross roads where all ways appear to be the right paths. A free man can perceive the right path and can choose the right path, right means of livelihood (*artha*), right desire (*kāma*) and right principles (*dharma*). One free and unbiased man can understand the distinction between ‘*arta and anartha*’, ‘*kāmanā and vāsanā*’, and ‘*dharma and adharma*’. There is a chance that man can be deluded by the misconception of *dharma*. As the desires in us, so are our thoughts. At every moment, the texture and quality of our thoughts are directly conditioned and controlled

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by our desires. Thoughts in an individual, expressed in the outer world-of-objects, become his actions. As it thinks, so it becomes. Actions are nothing other than the agent's thoughts projected and expressed in the world. Thus, in this chain of ignorance, constituted of desires, thoughts and actions, each one of us is caught and bound. Naturally, therefore, if the Supreme can be defined as 'the experience beyond ignorance', it must necessarily be true that the Self is the state of desirelessness or the condition of thoughtlessness or the life of actionlessness. By mere renunciation-of-action (*sanyāsa*) no one attains perfection. Running away from life is not the way to reach the highest goal of evolution. Every action does not bring about bondages upon the doer. It is only unintelligent activities that thicken the impressions in the mind, and build a thick and impenetrable wall between the ego and the unlimited Divine spark of life in us. All activities other than *Yajna*-activities will bring about *vāsanā*-bondages, and the individual's ultimate development and growth (Self-transformation) will be arrested. *Yajna*-activities are performed for *Lokasangraha* based on the ideal of *Nishkāmakarma*.

Kāmanā for *moksa* (*Moksa kāmanā*) is pro-existence. Generally, it is believed that *moksa* is attainable after life which ensures no further existence. This means *moksa* is such a state which cannot be experienced all through our existence. And if this is so assumed, the concept of *moksa* or any discussion about *moksa* appears to be mystical and unpractical. Any mystic and unpractical theory cannot be treated as a value-paradigm. The sense of freedom is required for other three values of life – *artha*, *kāma* and *dharma*. *Dharma* regulates empirical existence according to the principle of righteousness and helps it transcend to the transcendental existence (*moksa*) which can be attained but not experienced. *Moksa* or ultimate freedom from the life-cycle is attainable but not experienciable because in this state there is no distinction between the three faculties of cognition such as experience, object of experience and the subject of experience. This is also known as disembodied state of freedom or *videhamukti*. This transcendental state of freedom or *videhamukti* is accepted by almost all orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. But *jeevanamukti* is attainable and experienciable in our practical life. *Jeevanamukti* is the empirical pursuit of freedom which is attained by psychic discipline through rigorous ethical practices. By the word '*jeevanamukti*' literally we mean '*mukti* in *jeevana*' or living freely while living our life. Out of the four *Purusārthas*, *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* are directly regulated by the state of *Jeevanamukti* and in the next step, when one has already attained *Jeevanamukti*, one can attain the highest freedom from

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life cycle which is known as *Videhamukti*. But in order to attain this highest form of disembodied freedom, one must be qualified to attain the state of *Jivanamukti*. *Jivanamukti* is the state of freedom while living an embodied life. The *Bhagavat Gitā* has given much importance on *Jivanamukti* as it is the highest form of self-transformation. The self transforms from ignorance to knowledge and from bondage to liberation gradually through spiritual *sāadhanā* or through the practice of *Yoga*.

Conclusion

Dialectical understanding is more important than mere analytical discussion of any concepts or issues. In dialectical understanding we are introduced with the pairs of opposites relevant to our practical life-situations and thereby, we not only get benefit of conceptual clarity but also real transformation in our personality. The personality of *Arjuna* has been transformed from the state of frustration and confusion (*Visāda*) to the state of steadfast wisdom (*sthitaprajna*) through proper dialectical counseling made by *Lord Krishna*. Here, in this paper, we discussed how the dialectics of *dharma* and *adharma* are seminal in their appropriate contexts. *Dharma* is not restricted to the institutional religions and dogmatic adherence to the fixed rules. *Dharma* is understood in the ethical sense as the principle of righteousness and the assessment of right or wrong is also context-specific. The same action is judged both *dharma* and *adharma* from different contexts. This opens the door of free will in spite of the existing vibrant determining factors of life-situations. We are free to moderate the fixed rules according to the demand of the current situations. In this model of contextualism, we give importance to the person, time and context rather than the formal rules. The best parameter of righteousness is the *Gita* model of *Svadharmā* and *Lokasangraha* as discussed in this paper. Secondly, the dialectics of *kāma* and *niskāma* made us clear about the positive significance of both desire as *Purusārtha* and *desirelessness* as *Paramapurusārtha*. Without desire no action can be initiated but the same desire becomes our passion and binds us. Similarly, *desirelessness* does not mean the renunciation of all activities in life; rather it means the art of desire-management leading to self-transformation. The dialectics of *artha* and *anartha* remind us the fatal crisis of suffering relating to excess possession of anything in life. For living our practical life *artha* is urgently necessary but the same *artha* becomes *anartha* or detrimental to our very existence when it is pursued without the principle of righteousness (*dharma*). We should live a meaningful life. Our life should be

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dedicated for *lokasangraha*. This is the noblest value-paradigm. Hence *artha* and *kāma* should be pursued in accordance with *dharma* leading to *moksa*, the highest goal of life. Finally, the dialectics of *Jeevanamukti* and *Videhamukti* make us understand the real freedom of life. Freedom does not mean ‘freedom from life’; rather it means ‘freedom in life’. We should live a life of *Jeevaamukta* in this life with all the disparities. Freedom from the life-cycle and the embodied existence is *Videhamukti*. That is attained but never experienced in life. But we experience the state of *Jeevanamukta*. We should act with a mind of *sthitaprajna* for *lokasangraha*. This is the highest transformation of an individual. This is possible through the dialectical understanding of the opposite facets of empirical contingencies. Transcendence is possible through the dialectical understanding that gives scope for comprehensive and all-inclusive realization resulting in the real transformation in our personality.

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