



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2018; 4(12): 495-497
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 01-09-2018
Accepted: 08-10-2018

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Four cardinal values of Indian philosophy

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Abstract

That which is good or valuable (ISTA) for man, beneficial to him, and desired by him (Kamya) is 'purushartha'. It is opposite to evil, bad or disvalue (Anista) and undesirable. In this way, the evaluation of man's behaviour in his life is divided into two categories- praiseworthy and blameworthy, and happiness and sorrow, respectively, which depends on his preference as we see in cases of Yudhisra and Duryodhan, Ram and Ravana, Buddh and Angulimal, Mahavir and Hitler and so on. All these issues can be covered under the study of purushartha. The purushartha scheme is conflicting and complex because it is devised to organise, structure and regulate the complex and conflicting nature, acts and values of human beings. However, despite serious attempts made over the centuries, it always remains problematic both in theory and practice. This paper is a humble attempt to understand a few issues addressed by this schema, which is men centric value system conceived to be functioning within the holistic cosmic framework by the Indian visionaries (Rishi's). This is a master holistic framework which has been at work to create and sustain, great culture and civilization. For this reason, the Vedic tradition is called a worldview of Sanatana-dharma.

Keywords: Cardinal, purushartha, dharma, moksha

Introduction

Indian philosophy encompasses a rich tapestry of philosophical traditions that have developed over thousands of years. It is characterized by its diversity and depth, offering unique insights into the nature of reality, consciousness, ethics, and the purpose of human existence. Four core values that underpin Indian philosophy include Dharma, Karma, Moksha, and Ahimsa. These values shape the way individuals live, think, and engage with the world. In this essay, we will explore each of these values, their significance, and their contributions to Indian philosophical thought.

1. Dharma

Dharma is a foundational value in Indian philosophy and is derived from the Sanskrit word 'dhri,' meaning "to uphold" or "to sustain." Dharma encompasses a complex set of ethical, moral, and social responsibilities that guide individuals in leading a righteous life. It is often understood as the natural order or harmony that upholds the universe. Within Hindu philosophy, dharma is seen as the duty or role that an individual has in society. It emphasizes the importance of fulfilling one's obligations and responsibilities, whether as a student, householder, or spiritual seeker. Dharma provides a framework for ethical conduct, emphasizing virtues such as honesty, compassion, and non-violence. It encourages individuals to act selflessly and make decisions that benefit both themselves and the greater community. Let us delve further into its significance within Indian philosophy. Dharma encompasses not only individual duties and responsibilities but also the broader moral and ethical principles that govern society. It provides a framework for harmonious living and upholding social order. In this sense, Dharma serves as a moral compass, guiding individuals in making decisions that align with righteousness and the greater good. The concept of Dharma acknowledges the interdependence and interconnectedness of all beings. It recognizes that each individual has a unique role to play in the intricate web of existence. Whether as a parent, a teacher, a ruler, or a laborer, everyone has a specific Dharma that contributes to the functioning of the whole. Dharma emphasizes the importance of acting selflessly, without attachment to personal gain or egoistic desires.

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to prioritize the welfare of others and to consider the consequences of their actions on the well-being of the community. By adhering to Dharma, individuals contribute to the preservation of social harmony, justice, and the overall welfare of society. Furthermore, Dharma extends beyond human relationships and includes the relationship between humans and nature. It recognizes the need for environmental stewardship, promoting a sustainable and respectful approach to the natural world. This ecological dimension of Dharma emphasizes the interconnectedness between humans and their environment, emphasizing the responsibility to live in harmony with nature. In summary, Dharma in Indian philosophy encompasses individual duties, ethical principles, and societal harmony. It guides individuals in leading a righteous life, making decisions that benefit both themselves and the community. By upholding Dharma, individuals contribute to the preservation of social order, justice, and the well-being of all beings. Dharma encompasses not only human relationships but also emphasizes our responsibility to live in harmony with nature, recognizing the interdependence between humans and the environment.

2. Karma

Karma, another fundamental concept in Indian philosophy, is derived from the Sanskrit word 'kri,' meaning "action" or "deed." It refers to the principle of cause and effect, asserting that every action has consequences that shape one's future experiences. The concept of karma is closely intertwined with the belief in reincarnation and the cycle of birth and death. According to the law of karma, every action, whether physical, mental, or verbal, creates an imprint on an individual's consciousness. These imprints, known as samskaras, influence future experiences and determine one's destiny in subsequent lives. The goal is to perform positive and virtuous actions, known as good karma, which lead to favourable outcomes and spiritual progress.

Karma also emphasizes personal responsibility and accountability for one's actions. It encourages individuals to be mindful of their intentions and the potential consequences of their choices. By cultivating awareness and making conscious decisions, one can shape their future and strive for spiritual growth. Let's delve deeper into the significance of Karma within Indian philosophy.

Karma, as discussed earlier, is the principle of cause and effect. It underscores the idea that every action, whether physical, mental, or verbal, carries consequences that shape an individual's future experiences. Karma is intimately connected to the belief in reincarnation and the cycle of birth and death.

The concept of Karma places responsibility and accountability on individuals for their actions and choices. It emphasizes the notion that one's present circumstances are the result of past actions, and future experiences will be influenced by present actions. In this way, Karma serves as a moral framework that encourages individuals to be mindful of their intentions and actions.

Karma encompasses both the individual and collective spheres. On an individual level, it emphasizes personal growth and spiritual progress. Positive and virtuous actions, known as good Karma, generate positive outcomes and contribute to one's spiritual development. Conversely,

harmful actions, known as bad Karma, lead to negative consequences and hinder spiritual growth.

Beyond the individual, Karma also acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings. Actions have ripple effects that extend beyond the immediate doer. They can impact others, society, and even the broader cosmic order. This recognition underscores the importance of ethical behavior, as one's actions can influence the well-being of others and the overall harmony of the universe.

Karma encourages individuals to cultivate awareness and make conscious choices. It invites introspection and self-reflection, enabling individuals to understand the motivations behind their actions and make positive changes. By embracing the principles of Karma, individuals strive to act with integrity, compassion, and mindfulness, seeking to create a positive ripple effect in the world.

It is important to note that Karma is not deterministic but rather presents the idea of a probabilistic relationship between actions and outcomes. While past actions can shape present circumstances, individuals have the capacity to make choices in the present moment that can influence future experiences. This understanding empowers individuals to take responsibility for their lives and work towards creating a more positive and virtuous future.

In summary, Karma is a fundamental concept within Indian philosophy that emphasizes the principle of cause and effect. It highlights personal responsibility, accountability, and the interconnectedness of all beings. Karma serves as a moral framework that encourages individuals to be mindful of their actions, cultivate positive intentions, and strive for personal growth and the betterment of the world. By embracing the principles of Karma, individuals seek to create a more harmonious and compassionate reality.

3. Moksha

Moksha, often translated as liberation or enlightenment, is the ultimate goal of many Indian philosophical traditions. It represents the liberation from the cycle of birth and death and the attainment of self-realization and union with the divine. Moksha is seen as the highest state of consciousness, characterized by eternal bliss, peace, and transcendence.

Different philosophical schools offer various paths to Moksha, recognizing the diversity of human nature and spiritual inclinations. These paths include Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion), Karma (action), and Yoga (meditation and contemplation), among others. Each path offers unique practices and methodologies to dissolve the ego, transcend the material world, and awaken to one's true nature.

Let's explore the significance of Moksha within Indian philosophy.

The pursuit of Moksha is rooted in the understanding that human existence is marked by suffering and the transient nature of the material world. It is a quest to transcend the limitations of the ego and the material realm, and to realize the true nature of oneself and the interconnectedness of all existence.

The pursuit of Moksha involves self-inquiry, introspection, and the cultivation of spiritual practices. It requires individuals to look beyond the external world and turn inward to explore the depths of their consciousness. By delving into the nature of the self, individuals seek to realize their essential divinity and the underlying unity of all existence.

Moksha represents a state of profound freedom and liberation from the limitations of the ego, desires, and attachments. It is a state of consciousness that transcends dualities, such as pleasure and pain, good and bad, and individual and universal. In this state, one experiences a profound sense of interconnectedness with all beings and a deep recognition of the underlying unity of existence.

While Moksha is often considered the ultimate goal, it is important to note that it is not reserved for a select few or achieved through external accomplishments. It is an inherent potential within every individual, regardless of their societal position, gender, or background. The path to Moksha is open to all who seek liberation and are willing to undertake the inner journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth.

In summary, Moksha is a central concept in Indian philosophy, representing the pursuit of liberation and self-realization. It is a transcendent state of consciousness characterized by eternal bliss, peace, and unity with the divine. The paths to Moksha encompass various spiritual practices and methodologies, all aimed at transcending the limitations of the ego and realizing the interconnectedness of all existence. Moksha is the ultimate fulfilment of the human quest for meaning, purpose, and liberation from suffering.

4. Ahimsa

Ahimsa, meaning non-violence or non-harming, is a fundamental principle that permeates Indian philosophy, particularly within Jainism and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Ahimsa goes beyond refraining from physical violence and extends to thoughts, speech, and actions. It embodies a deep respect for all living beings and promotes compassion, empathy, and peaceful coexistence.

Ahimsa recognizes the interconnectedness of all life and encourages individuals to treat every being with kindness and understanding. It rejects any form of aggression, harm, or exploitation towards others, including humans, animals, and the environment.

Ahimsa is not limited to external behaviour but also includes internal attitudes and intentions. It emphasizes the importance of cultivating a non-violent mind-set, free from anger, hatred, and prejudice. Practicing ahimsa involves developing empathy and seeking peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

Ahimsa has had a profound impact on Indian society and has been influential in inspiring movements of social justice and non-violent resistance. Mahatma Gandhi, a prominent advocate of ahimsa, employed non-violent strategies in the Indian independence movement, inspiring similar movements worldwide. Ahimsa serves as a powerful tool for promoting harmony, justice, and the pursuit of truth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the values of Dharma, Karma, Moksha, and Ahimsa are fundamental pillars of Indian philosophy. They provide a comprehensive framework for ethical living, spiritual growth, and harmonious existence. These values shape individual behaviour, guide moral decision-making, and inspire a deep reverence for life and the interconnectedness of all beings.

By upholding Dharma, individuals fulfil their responsibilities and contribute to the well-being of society. Through understanding Karma, individuals recognize the consequences of their actions and strive for positive

outcomes. The pursuit of Moksha leads individuals towards self-realization, transcendence, and union with the divine. Finally, practicing Ahimsa fosters compassion, non-violence, and peaceful coexistence.

These values are not mutually exclusive but are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. They offer profound insights into the nature of reality, the purpose of human existence, and the pursuit of a meaningful and virtuous life.

It's important to note that the above discussion provides a general overview of these values in Indian philosophy, and different philosophical schools may interpret and emphasize them differently. For a deeper understanding, it is recommended to consult the works of various philosophers and texts of Indian philosophy.

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