CHAPTER I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
1. The Crucial Question

Does our life have a goal? If yes, what is that goal that makes life meaningful? This is one of the most radical and challenging of questions humans have ever asked. This question of the goal and meaning of life can be asked in a different and concrete manner: **What kinds of things are good, ultimately worth aiming at, in life?** No other question has stirred human hearts so deeply, for so long a time. Neither has any philosophy nor religion swayed great masses of mankind until it has answered this crucial question. And, historically speaking, the discussion concerning the goal and meaning of life has grown in significance with the growth of philosophies and religions.

2. The Indian Answer

The present study proposes to focus on the Indian answer to this fundamental question of the meaning and goal of life. The Indian answer is the **fourfold scheme of purusharthas**. That is to say, dharma artha kama and moksha are the kinds of things that are said to be good, ultimately worth aiming at, in life.

This answer, by common acceptation, is one of the basic theories of classical Indian Philosophy. It is a theory of human values both in substance and in virtue of the meaning of 'purushartha'. The theory of Purusharthas is central to classical Indian Ethics and even to the whole of classical Indian Philosophy. It pervades our culture. Our classical literature and art, philosophical or not, is replete with it, though a scientific treatise of it may not be found in any one of them.

3. The Need for a Critique

Indian philosophical traditions, while discussing man and society, usually revolve round three central themes. They are varna, asrama and purushartha.
These three themes are taken to be interactional in the sense that each cannot be understood without the other. Besides being interactional, these are also taken to be hierarchical: The concept of purushartha is supposed to be more fundamental than the other two for two reasons. One, it defines the ultimate goals of life. Two, it encompasses within it all our actual and possible goals.

But, are these reasons really valid? Do the purusharthas designate clearly the goals we pursue or ought to pursue? In other words, this answer in terms of the purusharthas to the question of the goal and meaning of life has to be examined more closely. For, the Indian analysis, especially the traditional one, of this area of ethics has been rather confusing. Also, it has not been as extensive as might be expected. Given this unsatisfactory context, a critique of the purusharthas is in order.

4. The Present Purpose

As the title of the thesis suggests, the purpose of this critique is simple and straightforward: To appraise and update our thinking on the purusharthas. This appraisal and updating are undertaken not merely to criticize but to explore the new demands we must make from them. There is much to reflect upon in terms of the need to update our thinking on the purusharthas so as to fit it into the modern ways of thinking. For instance, how shall we interpret the concept of purusharthas in the light of the Gandhian thought? Or, How does the concept of purusharthas become immediately relevant in the context of the present day ecological crisis? In short, the area of Indian ethics we intend to look into is this: What is the relevance and currency of the purusharthas today and for tomorrow?
What is intended, in other words, is not a historical debate regarding the theory. Nor is an authentic exegesis our main concern. Rather, our interest will be in a philosophical analysis and appraisal of the theory. And this is done by looking at the salient features of the four purusharthaś and their interrelationship.

5. Contextualization

By way of giving a concrete focus for this philosophical analysis and appraisal, we limit ourselves mainly to the context of the Mahabharata which is still widely loved and vividly told in our countryside. Besides its popularity, its variety of contexts gives us ample scope for discussion and sprinkles the thesis with the fragrance of our living past. In particular, we focus on the Story of Rishyasringa as narrated in this unrivalled original classic.

The Mahabharata of which it is said that 'what is not in it is nowhere' is one of our noblest heritages. This Ithihasa contains a philosophy of life. The kind of society that the Mahabharata discloses is in many ways similar to the India of our own time especially in the area of its values and ideals. (As if conveying its message, the Mahabharata has another name known to the scholars - 'Jaya'). There would be hardly any Indian who has not come under the elevating influence of Mahabharata in some significant manner. Hence this contextualization of the thesis is indeed justified.

6. The Significance of This Exploration

What are the factors that make this exploration of the purusharthaś significant? We have already referred to two such factors. They are (i) The crucial nature of the question and (ii) the inadequate discussion on the purusharthaś so far.
There are several additional factors that make this exploration significant. A few of them deserve special mention.

(iii) When rendered into English, one of the meanings of the Sanskrit word 'purushartha' is 'meaning of life'. If it means meaning of life, it presupposes another question that we need to look into first: Is life meaningful? For, to ask what the meaning of life is, is to assume that life is itself meaningful. But what if there are people who doubt whether life has any meaning at all? So the question of purushartha - the meaning of life - needs to be examined.

(iv) Even if we assume that life is meaningful, the problem is not over. What are the goals that make one's life meaningful? The goals of life are said to be dharma, artha, kama, and moksha - the fourfold scheme of purusharthas. If so, an examination of these goals and their interrelationship is likely to make our life more meaningful. Given the fact that dharma-artha-kama-moksha are a matter of utmost concern to everybody this examination becomes all the more imperative. And that is precisely what this research is meant to do.

7. Specific Goals

This study is not only significant but has also some specific goals in addition to the usual objectives that are common to people who do doctoral work. One such specific goal is to discuss and formulate certain issues concerning the purusharthas in the context of the Mahabharata. This discussion is going to be contextual rather than authentically exegetical. And it is hoped that what is thus formulated may be theoretically and practically important to all those who are serious about their ultimate goal in life.

Another specific goal is to get a clearer understanding of the underlying motives of human behavior. Since we are going to consider the purusharthas in the
context of the predicament of Rishyasringa in particular, this discussion is likely to be helpful in understanding the several varieties of contemporary behavior. For instance, it might be of help in understanding the predominant role of the virtuous men, like Gandhiji, in determining the conduct of individuals.

8. The Problem Spelled out

The significant factors and the specific goals mentioned above have one thing in common: They all point to the kind of problems we shall here be concerned with. To give greater clarity and clearer direction to our discussion, these problems are to be sequentially stated and reasonably inflated now.

Does life make sense? Is it worthwhile? Assuming that it is worthwhile, what make(s) it worthwhile? 'They are the purusharthas', said the sages. Is this insight sagacious? If yes, the question is: What are the kinds of acts one should perform and how should one perform them in order to realize this fourfold goal?

How do we know that the purusharthas make life meaningful? What is the exact number of purusharthas - three, four or more? To use the language of the neologism, could there be a `meta purushartha' that helps us to attain the other purusharthas and thus takes us beyond them all? If yes, what is it and how is it? Can bhakti or sarvodaya / logasamgraha, for instance, be regarded as a meta purushartha?

What are we to make of the traditional understanding of the purusharthas, especially in the context of the story of Rishyasringa? Can we group the first three purusharthas under the supremacy of the fourth one, namely, moksha? In other words, how are the various purusharthas interrelated? Are they in an ascending
order of authority, as has been traditionally held, moksha being the supreme? Is moksha the paramapurushartha? Or, are they all of equal ranking, becoming a means rather than a goal? If yes, what is that goal?

Or, let us look at them this way: are the purusharthas mutually exclusive? That is, some people go for kama, while others amass artha, and others strive for dharma, and still others, renouncing all the three, apply themselves for moksha. Is this the way to structure the purusharthas? If not, how?

Regarding this structure of purusharthas, at least three points need to be clarified: a) How far does this structure provide us a practical guide? b) How far can we affirm that the account of this motivational structure is theoretically adequate? c) What is the contemporary relevance of this structure in understanding the behavior patterns, and how far can it be used it as a guide to future conduct?

Having thus spelled out the problem in order to make it operational, we now pass on to a brief consideration of the method and manner of presenting the thesis.

9. The Method

'Assess the tree by its fruits, not by its leaves', said Euripides long ago. This is the method we intend to employ in our inquiry. That is, we look at the consequents and thus determine the nature of their antecedents. The underlying rule is this: If the consequent is false and the sequence valid then the antecedent is false. To follow this rule of conditional reasoning is to look for an alternative. By way of looking for an alternative, we employ the usual scientific method which has four stages. First, we observe the facts. Observation of facts in turn involves four stages: Definition, analysis, elimination and varying the circumstances.
Second, formulation of a hypothesis. Third, Verification of the hypothesis. Fourth, Proof. In scientific language, for the verification of a hypothesis to become a proof there has to be a 'crucial instance' or a 'crucial experiment'. For example, a certain kind of blood test is a crucial instance of proving who the real father of a particular child is, in case of a conflict. So, a crucial instance can prove at the same time that, in a particular case, one hypothesis is true and all other hypotheses are false.

In the case of the purusharthas, we can verify our hypothesis, but we cannot prove it by a crucial experiment, so as to make it a purely scientific proof. (Verification is not proof and therefore does not become a law. For, according to strict scientific rules, a verification becomes a proof only if all other alternative hypotheses are proved false by means of a crucial experiment). For, though the method we employ is scientific the topic of our discussion is an ethico-philosophical one, and therefore we can only make a stronger case for a particular hypothesis.

Given this special nature of this discussion, our method may be described as interpretative, normative and therapeutic. It is interpretative in so far as it tries to answer the question of what comprises the four purusharthas. It is normative in so far as it attempts to answer the question of what one should do.

It is therapeutic in the sense that it is educational. That is, on the one hand, it tries to answer the question of how our innate propensities can be molded to enable us to live up to the scheme of purusharthas; and, on the other, it tries to answer the question of how a way of life conforming to the purusharthas can be secured against the threat of misery and conflict that we are constantly in touch with.
This interpretative, normative and therapeutical approach is taken in this research with a view to making it a qualitative one. And this we hope to do without, however, deviating from the usual steps of scientific method.

10. Tools of Inquiry

In one word, let us call this method exploratory. Now, the question is: What are the tools of this exploratory approach? As already said, discussion is the central technique. And for this, all the relevant tools are made use of. Some of the important tools are: Survey of available materials on the subject, use of appropriate and authoritative texts, and consultation with experts.

What is special about these tools is that they are also sources for us to collect data from. Besides the Mahabharata containing stories like that of Rishyasringa, the primary sources are the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana, the Arthasastra of Kautilya and the dharmasastra of Manu. The secondary sources are the various writings on the purusharthas, findings and opinions of scholars concerning them, and the diverse interpretations people have given. Some of the thinkers who have taken the problem of purusharthas critically and whose arguments have proved highly useful in our discussion, are Karl H. Potter, M. Hiriyanna, K. J. Shah, Daya Krishna, Rajendra Prasad, R. Sundara Rajan and Talghatti. References to their views and works will be made as and when required. In this process of data collection and discussion, also interviews and periodicals and a variety of other texts have yielded valuable information.
11. Limitations

The method and the tools employed have certain constraints. For, they imply, among other points, an evaluation of the existing materials on purusharthas. Now, are we justified in this, considering the fact that the questions involved are mostly ethical in nature? Can we sit on Solomon's chair? How can we assume the posture of a critic? This is a limitation especially in so far as our discussion is more contextual than strictly textual. However, this evaluatory approach is not without any justification at all: For, the position is not that this scheme of values is insignificant but that its significance has not been fully brought out.

Another limitation is this: As the thesis unfolds, some important and related questions crop up, such as i) What is the nature of Indian philosophy - Is it world-and-life negating? ii) How is spirituality and philosophy related? iii) How do the purusharthas compare with similar values in the West? But reasons of convenience and cogency coerce us to avoid a detailed discussion of the first two questions and to bypass the third.

Let us make this point clearer: Our word for philosophy is darsana which literally means 'seeing'. And, darsana is used to refer to any school of Indian thought such as Samkhya Darsana and Advaita Darsana. This special use of the term darsana reveals that these schools tend to have a theological focus and are supposed to lead to a dominance of spirituality over philosophy. The validity of this supposition we do not intend to test. But we cannot but examine the question of how Indian philosophy is related to spirituality or moksha.

However, we limit ourselves mainly to two questions only which we repeat: i) What are the kinds of things ultimately worth aiming at? ii) And what kinds of acts should we perform and how? Even this is a limitation in the sense that these two
questions do not receive equal treatment in the thesis. The accent falls on the first question - the question of the purusharthas.

Further, we don't intend to go into fields of inquiry like 'meta-ethics' which considers the meaning of ethical words. Nor do we intend to go into more related questions like what are the conditions of our moral responsibility. Rather, our concern is to discover some acceptable and rationally defensible views with regard to the purusharthas.

12. Manner of Presentation

Keeping these limitations in mind, we now pass on to the question of how this discussion is being chapterised. It runs into seven chapters. Chapter I gives a General Introduction which is an initiation into and an orientation towards the thesis. Chapter II, What Makes Life Human, is divided into two sections. The story of Rishyasringa, in section one, brings out the ridiculousness of following any one purushartha to the exclusion of others. That life is meaningful, the first assumption the story of Rishyasringa makes, is the topic of discussion in the second section.

Chapter III, Scanning the Concepts, runs through four sections looking at the purusharthas in general, retrieving the word-meaning, the concepts, and the history of the trivarga - dharma, artha and kama. This scanning continues in Chapter IV where moksha, the fourth purushartha, is considered. Here the concept of moksha, the question of immortality and the relationship between Moksha and Indian Philosophy are issues discussed in three successive sections.

Chapter V takes up the question of Interrelationship. In it the first section examines the various traditionally held positions and finds that they are all partly true
but wholly false. The second section deals with the question of how kama defines the goal of life. The third section shows that the purusharthas are the a priori conditions of being a human being. The question of trivarga or chaturvarga is taken up in the fourth section. Whether we can include moksha in kama is the topic of discussion in the fifth section. Sixth section considers the reasons for the introduction of Moksha as the fourth purushartha.

Coming to the terminal part of the thesis, Chapter VI gathers some Lessons from Experience. In the first section, illustrations are given to show how in the absence of mutual control each purushartha tends to go to extremes. The present day ecological crisis is another illustration of how disastrous it is to follow any one or two purusharthas exclusively. This is what the second section is busy with. The third section presents the Gandhian view of Purusharthas which is essentially an integral approach.

Chapter VII, Some Relevant Implications, does two things. In the first section, it raises the question whether there is any need for positing a Metapurushartha. Here it is argued that if at all there is such a need, it must be sarvodaya / lokasamgraha and not moksha which is traditionally held to be the paramapurushartha. The Second section gives a synoptic summary of the whole thesis.

13. Two Empirical Observations

Having shown the manner of presentation, we now conclude this Introductory Chapter with two empirical observations which will be of immense help to us in our discussions. The constant conflict and the illusory quest are the two observations we ought to make.
(i). **Constant Conflict.** We are all trained from childhood to exercise every form of effort. Observe, for instance, the tremendous efforts we make to control ourselves, to suppress, adjust and modify ourselves to certain patterns or goals we have set. From this observation we can take one thing for certain: There is constant struggle caused by conflict. In fact, we live with it and die with it.

In other words, the point is that it is impossible to live our daily lives without a single conflict. In fact, this pattern of conflict has been followed generation after generation, in ourselves, in our children, in the young and the old.

(ii). **Illusory Quest.** The second aspect of our human condition that we need to observe is this: We either fail to achieve the goals we are striving for or else we do achieve them only to find them grossly disappointing. But as soon as we discover that a particular end was not really worth pursuing, our eyes are set on a new one and the same illusory quest begins all over again.

Accordingly, what we aim at lies either in the future or in the past. This also means that the present is insufficient; the future is uncertain; and the past is irrevocable.

That constant conflict and illusory quest are aspects of our human condition is amply illustrated by many a story in the *Mahabharata*. For instance, the experience of Yudhistira (Dharmaraja), especially both before, during and after the *kurukshetra* war. Before the war, he was fighting with Karna for eighteen years thinking that Karna was his enemy; after the war he lived for eighteen years regretting that he killed Karna who he realized was his brother.

With these introductory words of initiation into and orientation towards the thesis, we now turn to the Story of Rishyasringa which implies what we want to arrive at in our discussion.