Chapter III

THE ĀŚRAMAS AND IDEALS OF PURUSHĀRTHAS AND SAMSKĀRAS

The Hindu view of life is a complex combination of several virtues and practices that a man is expected to follow throughout his life. On one hand it reflects rigidity of ideas and conservatism in social and personal behaviour on the other it mirrors a society that was based on high social values and moral ideals in which practice of restraints in behaviour at every step was made a norm of life for the larger benefit of the entire society and ultimate good of the mankind. For this purpose our seers devised a scientific classification of our actions and the bodies instrumental for implementing them easily in life with a full explanation behind every suggestion that was made mandatory to be followed by all members of the society. Thus based on the principle of work requirements and professions that should be followed, the concept chaturavarnya was introduced dividing the society in to Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. It ideally covered the entire society and its requirements of intellectual thinking, defence and protection of human race, production, consumption and its management and the work force required to fulfil the material needs of mankind. It is altogether a different question as to how this ideal was distorted for some selfish motives with passage of time. All this we have already discussed in the previous chapter. Like the chaturavarṣa vyavastha that was applied to the social division, even an individual’s life was divided in to four stages known as chaturāśrama vyavastha thus assigning specific tasks for each stage of life. But it was not only the material needs of the society and an individual that were looked into but they were backed by deeper spiritual pursuits to be followed for the attainment of ultimate salvation of soul. These pursuits were not to be a mere show of high thinking but practical ideals to be imbued and practiced at every step through an ideal conduct in every work assigned or an ideal combination of work and enjoyment. These were also divided in to four parts known as chaturavidpurushārtha comprising righteous conduct, righteous economic pursuits, righteous enjoyment of life leading to the emancipation of soul from the cycle of death and birth. The advancement of human race and its civilized nature that distinguishes it from all other living beings on this earth was
further thought of. Man was not to lead an aimless life only to fulfil his physical requirement and die but at every step of life a specific ceremony was performed that signified not only the physical existence but also the purpose for it. It made every human being a desired member of the social setup with an assigned task. These were given the name of sanāskāras, sixteen in number from conception to death. In this elaborate structure of social behaviour through various institutions the ultimate fulfilment of life was the cherished desire. This has been specifically explained in our sacred texts time and again as we shall note below. The three ideal divisions of the Āśramas, Purushārthas and the Sanāskāras are thus taken up in detail in this chapter.

The Āśramas

The word Āśrama (Ā-śrama) literally means a ‘resting place’. The word is derived from the āśram that mean to labour or work hard. But with the prefix ā, the meaning changes to ‘rest from labour or work’. It is variously used as an ‘abode’, ‘hermitage’, ‘teacher’s house where Brahmacharins stay to receive education’, etc. In the present context it means ‘a stage in the life of a Hindu’. As the entire life was divided into four stages or Āśramas, each with specific motive and assigned work, one had to successively pass through one resting place to the other that is from one span of life to the other. However, it has led some scholars to give an entirely different interpretation to the term. P. V. Kane has explained it as ‘ā śrāmyanti asmin iti āśramaḥ’, which means such a stage of life in which a man works very hard. He has been followed by some other writers on the subject. However, such an interpretation is slightly farfetched as work is an integral part of man’s life and one has to work in one way or the other throughout the life. Of course one is not expected to sit idle at any stage which would be contrary to the entire concept of the division of life in various stages. But to contrast it from ‘rest’ in the present context shall not be a very proper rendering of the term.

The specific reference to Āśramas or four stages of life is not available either in the Rgveda or in other Sanhitās, the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas. There are many references to students or brahmachārins in the Vedic literature and a full hymn of the Rgveda describes the marriage of the Sun wherein the entrance of the bride in the house of the in-laws with prayers for her happy married life is described. But it does not refer to the word grhaṣṭha for the householder or the second stage of life.
Likewise there are indirect references to saṁnyāsins also. But these references are so vague that it is not safe to conclude on their basis if the concept of four stages of life existed in the early Vedic age or not. However, the view that the concept of the four Āśramas is not pre-Buddhist cannot be accepted for the simple fact that it is mentioned in the early Upanishads, which are definitely pre-Buddhist.

The earliest definite referenced to the four stages of life is to be found in the Śvetāsvatara Upanishad. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upanishad mentions the four Āśramas in an indirect manner. Here the knower of Ātman i.e. Saṁnyāsin is contrasted with those who i) study i.e. Brahmachārins, ii) sacrifice and give alms i.e. Gṛhastha, and iii) anchorites i.e. Vānaprastha. This clearly shows that by the time of the oldest Upanishads, the fourfold division of man’s life had come to be established. In the first he was to study to acquire knowledge, in the second he was to get married, set up a home have children and to serve those in other three stages of life, in the third he was to retire from worldly life, retire to forest, practice austerities and read scriptures and in the fourth and last stage he was to renounce everything and become a wandering ascetic. From the time of the Upanishads onwards we find detailed description of the four stages of life and the Śmṛtis like those of Manu and Yajñavalkya contain details of each stage. Kautilya also has described the duties of the four Āśramas. In the Vedic age the life-span was presumed to be of one hundred year (Jīvema saradah satam) duration. It was divided into four parts of equal duration of twenty five years each. However, there was no hard and fast rule for the time span of each stage. Usually it was recommended that one should go to the next stage after completing the duties of the previous one. For instance, it was said that when one’s hair turns grey and one has grandson then a Gṛhastha either accompanied by his wife or alone should become an anchorite and retire to the forest. In each stage of life, fulfilling one’s duties and following ideals of life were greatly stressed upon.

**Brahmacharya**

In the first part one had to live with the teacher and obtain education. The student life in ancient Punjab appears to be very hard as compared with those of the modern times. According to the injunctions of the Śmṛtis, a student had to follow a strict code of discipline. The education of a Brāhmaṇa boy started at the age of seven and that of a Kshatriya at the age of ten. The Vaiṣyās could send their sons for
education as convenient to them. This starting of the education was called *Upanayana*, as the pupil was taken to the feet of the teacher, who was to teach his pupil not only the Veda, but also the rules of proper conduct and ceremonial purity which include details of daily ablutions and prayers. He was required to bathe daily and say his prayers with the Gāyatri Mantra and perform *Prāṇāyāma* – a sort of breathing exercise which gave a lot of Oxygen to the lungs. Morning and evening he had to make offerings to the fire. Having performed all this, he was to go to his teacher and make obeisance and pronounce his own name. He was required to sit close to the teacher with full attention. He was to receive his lesson when called upon to do so. The Brahmachārins were required to keep the following articles – a staff, deer-skin, the sacred thread and a girdle of specific material.

It was one of the bounden duties of a student to go to the nearby village for begging food for his teacher and his family as well as for himself from the houses of Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya or Vaiśya of good conduct. Having brought the food and made the offering to the fire, he should eat after obtaining permission from the teacher. He should avoid non-vegetarian food, liquor, smearing of his body with oily substances or putting collirium in the eyes. He should not use abusive and rough speech.

After completing his education he should offer some present to the teacher and may either return home and lead a householder’s (*upakurvāṇa*) life or remain a celibate (*naishṭhika*) all his life and work with the Guru. Here it must be pointed out that ancient Indian education aimed not only at imparting learning of texts but also had in view that every student should have a good idea of his religion and the culture of Indian people.

**Gṛhasṭha**

After completing the education a young man was advised to marry and enter the second stage of life. During this stage man was entrusted upon multiple duties. It was laid down for every householder that after performing ablutions, one should perform *Sandhyā*. Then he should perform the fire sacrifices (*agniṣṭoma*) and then the Vedic mantra in praise of the Sun should be recited (e.g. *udutyam jatavedasam*) and study the Vedas. Apart from the daily worship a householder must perform the
following five great sacrifices known as Panchamahāyajñas – Devayajña, Brahmayajña, Bhūtayajña, Piṭrayajña and the Atithiyajña.

1. The first is the daily offering of cooked cereal food to the gods by oblations in the fire.
2. The second is the study of the Veda.
3. The food that is left after making offering to the gods, is to be thrown for the dogs, crows etc.
4. Food to be given to Piṭras (or manes). Some call it tarpaṇa and give water.
5. One should offer food according to his means, to those who come to his door. Even if some needy comes in the evening and there is no food, he should be offered a seat on the earth with something spread over it, water and sweet words.

The householder is forcefully enjoined to distribute food to various persons. He should not prepare food for himself alone. The Yājñavalkya Śruti says na pachedamamātmane i.e one should not cook food for himself alone. The Gītā similarly emphasizes the sharing of one’s food with others and says that they commit sin who cook for their self only.

In the house the food should first be served to the children and the aged, the unmarried girls, the married girls staying with the parents, the pregnant and the sick. The householder and his wife should partake of what is left in the end. Alms should be given to Brahmachārīn after showing him honour, and to others who come to ask for it in the routine. If the friends and relatives come at proper time they should also be fed. A way-farer should be treated as a guest and the one who has mastered the Vedas is a Śroṭiyā. The householder should never covet to eat at another’s house. After having performed the evening Sandhyā and having given oblations to the fire, one should take food accompanied by those who are to be fed and then go to rest.

The Śruti lay down some beautiful rules for the guidance of the people for a clean and useful life. Yājñavalkya says, “One should get up in the Brahma Mahurat (i.e. the last part of the night) and ponder over his own interest in respect of the three ideals of dharma, artha and kāma. Those who are worthy on account of their age, learning, avocation, wealth and relations should be respected. Even a Śūdra of eighty

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years, if possessed of these qualities is to be honoured. These rules are common so far as the performance of sacrifice, studying scriptures and giving of charity is concerned for the upper three castes. The additional duties of a Brāhmaṇa are teaching, priesthood and accepting of gifts. The main duty of a Kshatriya is protection of people, of a Vaiśya money-lending, agriculture, trade and tending of cattle. For the Śūdra, the service of three higher castes, trade or crafts is recommended. These rules are laid out for an ideal householder in order to be followed to build a healthy society.

**Vānaprastha**

In ancient India people were expected not to remain addicted to the pursuit of earning or the pleasures of worldly life, but to seek voluntary retirement. It is laid down that when a man’s hair turn white or a grandson is born, he should retire to the forest. This was the third stage of life called Vānaprastha or the stay in the forest. In this stage of life man was to leave his home and repair to the forest accompanied by his wife. The later had the option to stay back in the care of the son. He should discard good food and all paraphernalia such as cow, horse, beds, etc. He should take with him the sacrificial fire for Vedic rituals and the instruments required there for. He should perform the five great sacrifices with the various types of holy corn such as Nīvara, etc. Or with vegetables, fruits and roots (kanda-mula). He should put on deer-skin or the bark of trees, should take bath morning and evening everyday and should bear matted hair, beard and nails. Whatever he has for himself to eat, out of that the sacrificial offerings and alms should be given. He should entertain the visitors by means of water, fruits and roots.

He should daily remain busy with the study of the Vedas. He should have self-control, friendly feelings for all, should do good to all, should be giver and never a recipient of charity and should be compassionate towards all beings. He should offer oblations into the fires named Grāhapatya (householder’s fire) and Āhavanīya (the fire taken from a householder). He should also perform the new moon and full moon sacrifices as well as the constellation (Pushyādi) and new-crop sacrifices and also the four-monthly and other Vedic rites. He should prepare the sacrificical offerings with the holy corn ripening in spring and autumn. Having offered it to the gods remaining he should put to his own use. He may use vegetables grown on land and water, flowers, roots and fruits and oils yielded by sacred trees like Ingudi. He should avoid
liquor and non-vegetarian food as also some of the vegetables like Śigraka and Bhūṣṭra. In the month of Āsvayuja he should give away the corn previously stored, worn out clothes, vegetables, fruits, etc. He should not eat whatever has been grown with the plough (halya) and has been abandoned by its owner. He may eat cooked on fire or what has ripened with time such as fruits. He may pound corn on stone or in mortar with pestle. He may store eatables for a month, six months or a year. Observing the vows of a Vānaprastha he should live a life of a recluse.

He should have five fires around him in summer, should live in open in the rains and in winter he should wear wet clothes. He should make no effort for his comfort, sleep on the ground like a Brahmachārin and should even lie down under the trees. In other words during the third stage of life man should lead a hard and simple life giving up all worldly comforts and should survive on the bare essentials.

**Saṅnyāsa**

Having spent the third part of life as a forest-dweller, man should become a wandering ascetic and renounce all company. One is entitled to this stage only after having studied the Vedas, having got sons and having performed sacrifices according to his means. These are the three debts called - Devaṛṇa, Pitrarṇa and Yajñaṛṇa. This is perhaps the toughest part of one’s life.

A wandering ascetic should carry a bamboo staff and a pot of water. He should always be calm and composed and wishing well of all beings. He may enter the village for food given in alms just enough for his needs. His utensils should be of bamboo, wood or earth. He should not be greedy. He should go out for alms at the fag end of the day when the householders have taken their meals. He should have control over his speech and eyes and he should not display his knowledge of Jyotisha, etc. Having controlled the organs of senses and having abandoned the attachment and enmity and causing no fear to the living beings by doing them wrong one obtains release from the cycle of birth and death (moksha).

A glimpse of the prevalence of Saṅnyāsāśrama in Punjab in the fourth century BCE comes from the Greek writers who accompanied Alexander. Strabo has noted that Onesicritus had met at Taxila as many as fifteen of them, all given to meditation. When they were told that Alexander wanted to learn their wisdom, one of
them replied that ‘no one coming in European clothes – cavalry cloak and broad-brimmed hat and top-boots, such as Macedonians wear – could learn their wisdom’\textsuperscript{12}. Several Greek historians have noted about various ways of life of the Brachmanes (Brāhmaṇas) that indicate towards the last two stages of life in the Hindu chaturvarṇā-ṛṣya-vyavasthā. Their way of life\textsuperscript{13}, their austerities\textsuperscript{14}, animal food forbidden to them\textsuperscript{15}, their surviving on water and fruits that fall to the ground by themselves on ripening\textsuperscript{16}, their aversion to society\textsuperscript{17}, etc. find copious mention throughout.

An interesting story of a certain Saṁnyāsin called Dandamis as narrated by the Greek writers of the time on the authority of Megasthenes\textsuperscript{18}, is worth noting in detail for having a glimpse of the Indian ascetics. King Alexander when he heard stories of Indian ascetics was desirous of meeting them and sent for Dandamis who was their president. “Onesicritus was therefore despatched to fetch him, and when he found the great sage he said: “Hail to thee, thou teacher of the Bragmanes. The son of the mighty god Zeus, King Alexander, who is the sovereign lord of all men, asks you to go to him, and if you comply, he will reward you with great and splendid gifts, but if you refuse will cut off your head.”

“Dandamis with a complacent smile, heard him to the end but did not so much as lift up his head from his couch of leaves, and while still retaining his recumbent attitude returned this scornful answer - “God, the Supreme King, is never the author of insolent wrong, but is the creator of light, of peace, of life, of water, of the body of man and of souls. He alone is the god of my homage, who abhors slaughter and instigates no wars. But Alexander is not God, since he must taste of death, and how can such as he be the world’s master, who has not yet reached the further shore of the river Tiberaboas, and has not as yet seated on the throne of universal dominion?..........Know this, however, that what Alexander offers me, and the gifts he promises, are all things to me utterly useless; but the things I prize, and find of real use and worth, are these leaves which are my house, these blooming plants which supply me with dainty food, and the water which is my drink, while all other possessions and things, which are amassed with anxious care, are wont to prove ruinous to those who amass them, and cause only sorrow and vexation, with which every poor mortal is fully fraught. But as for me, I lie upon the forest leaves, and, have nothing which requires guarding, close my eyes in tranquil slumber........The
earth supplies me with everything even as a mother her child with milk.............

Bragmanes neither love gold nor fear death. Go then and tell Alexander this: Dandamis has no need of aught that is yours, and therefore not go to you but if you want anything from Dandamis come you to him”19.

Here is a true picture that beautifully portrays the prevalence of the system of the stages of life in Punjab even in the post-Vedic times of which we should not have doubt about the earlier periods. How the righteous individuals of this land were conscious of their duties and stature is illustrated from another example of much earlier period. When Uddālaka Āruṇi directed some sages to repair to King Aśvapati of Kekaya to learn about Ātman, as narrated in the Chhândogya Upanishad, the latter, when approached, very humbly replied, “In my kingdom, there is no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no man without sacrificial fire, no ignorant person, no adulterator – whence an adulteress? I am going to perform a sacrifice, Sirs; and as much wealth as I give to each priest, I shall also give to you Sir. Please stay”20. This passage not only reflects high moral standards that prevailed in Punjab of those times but also vividly show that persons were committed to performance of their duties according to the varṇāśrama-dharma. Thus Aśvapati as a king was a Kshatriya grhastha who performed his duties of protection, sacrifice, honouring guests, etc. on one hand and did not mess with the duties of sannyāsins i.e. preaching of the principles of Ātman and Brahma on the other. Punjab, therefore, seems to have continued to follow the Vedic way of life till the end of the period under discussion in this study.

The Purushārthas

The Indian view of life has always stressed upon the theory of ‘means and ends’ for ideal living. Whereas due significance is given to the ‘ends’ or ‘goals’ of life it is emphasized at every step that only proper means can lead to the achievement of ideal goals. It is for this purpose that the theory of fourfold purushārthas has been propounded. The word purushārtha is a combination of two words purusha and artha, the former meaning a man or more properly a conscientious human being, and artha means an ‘aim’ or ‘goal’. Thus conscientiously achieving the ultimate goal of life is purushārtha. They are four in number and sometimes called chaturvarga namely dharma, artha, kāma and moksha. Of these the last one, emancipation from the cycle of birth and death, is the goal and the other three are means to achieve it. By
having an ideal combination of the first three it is possible to attain the fourth. Therefore, the first three are to be practiced to achieve the fourth. They are called *trivarga*.

The ancient Indians, as many a time misunderstood, did not believe only in the life of austerity or laid an undue emphasis on penance and meditation neglecting the mundane affairs of worldly life. They did not want the man to become a machine incapable of enjoying any pleasures of life. As such, work to fulfil the material requirements of life was an important but not the only aim of life. But overindulgence in pleasures of life or idleness too was abhorred. Thus an ideal combination of the three, the righteous conduct, the righteous pursuits for material gains and the righteous enjoyment of the pleasures of life, was visualized for the ultimate aim of *moksha*.

The early Vedic literature does not contain any specific references to the concept of the *purushārthas*. But there are plenty of indirect contextual references that indicate the Indian outlook towards the life from the very beginning. The ideals enumerated in the Brāhmaṇas and the Upanishads are nothing but an indication of the *purushārthas* as actually practiced in those times. The Sūtras also lay great emphasis on the performance of moral duties in life\(^2\). The *Atharvaveda* mentions *dharma* along with *ṛta, satya, tapas* and *karma\(^2\)*. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa refers to Indra as personification of *dharma*. The *Brhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* says that *dharma* is *Brahma\(^3\)*. It further says that dharma is power of Kshatra and there is nothing higher than *dharma\(^4\)*. Likewise the duties of Gṛhapati enumerated in various early texts leave no doubt the importance attached to *artha*. The clear concept of the *purushārthas* is given in the epics. The *Rāmāyaṇa\(^5\)* clearly says that the three *purushārthas* – *dharma, artha* and *kāma* have to be equally followed for bearing fruit as there should be no doubt about their co-existence. The *Mahābhārata\(^6\)* also lays down that it is not proper to follow any one *purushārtha* as all of them are equally important and should be equally followed. *Manu\(^7\)* also condemns a person who follows only of the *purushārthas*. The idea of the practice of the *trivarga* is repeated in several of the Purāṇas and other later works like the *Amarakośa*.
Dharma

Dharma takes precedence over the other two purushārthas and is always listed at the head of the three. Normally the word is translated in English as ‘religion’ and is understood in the sense of worship of a particular deity or set of deities or practice of a particular faith and performance of the rituals laid down for it. But it does not convey the true sense of the word. No doubt that practice or following a faith and its rituals may form part of dharma but it does not occur anywhere in its definition contained in the ancient texts. Dharma is righteous conduct or the practice of sacerdotal laws. S. Radhakrishnan has called it the truth of life, the force to determine our nature. Manu has clearly defined dharma as comprising of ten-fold virtues - contentment, forgiveness, self-control, non-stealing, honesty, control of the organs of senses, intelligence, knowledge, truthfulness and abstention from anger. In his second Pillar Edict, the great Mauryan emperor Asoka is very explicit in the definition of dharma when he says, ‘Dharma is meritorious. But what is dharma? It is minimum of sin, maximum of good, compassion, charity, truthfulness, purity (of mind and conduct), and gift of (spiritual) eyesight’. The Katha Upanishad goes to the extent of saying that the one who takes dharma as separate from ātman runs in waste after him. The Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad explains dharma as the sustainer of society. Ancient texts like the Mahābhārata, Smṛtis, etc. Variously associate it with duty, law, justice, etc. in the form of Rājadharma, Āśramadharma, Varṇadharma and so on.

It was expected of every person in the society to follow the rules of ideal conduct which were held sacred. Performance of one’s duty according to his assigned avocation was the greatest virtue or dharma and there was nothing worse than neglecting the sacred duties. This concept was also followed by the offshoots of Hinduism i.e. Buddhism, Jainism etc. and find copious mention in their teachings. The aim was clearly to have society free from all kinds of immoral social behaviour, where every person acted according to well-defined rules as means to emancipation.

Artha

For the sustenance and development of society, the fulfilment of the material needs of man is a prerequisite. That is possible only with the concerted effort, labour
and hard work. The ancient Indians were fully aware of this requirement. Thus to strike a balance they gave as much importance to the worldly affairs as to the other-worldly affairs. There is nothing farther from the truth when it is asserted that ancient Indians were solely devoted to religious and philosophical life caring little for the material advancement. Had such been the case, India could never be an advanced civilization. The material remains from the Harappan sites are living testimony to this fact. India remained foremost in all spheres of material life and the artistic as well as technical advancement in ancient times had all the civilizations of the world vie with it for parity.

*Artha* is normally taken to mean wealth that is required for material needs of human beings. It is also defined as an object of desire by everybody i.e. *arthayate sarvaḥ iti arthaḥ*. But the desire to obtain wealth for material needs had to be righteous and earned through just means for just purpose. That is why it was specifically laid down that *artha* was meant to pursued only in the second stage of life i.e. *Gṛhasthāśrama*. That is why Manu has attached so much importance to the second stage of life when he remarked that ‘one may forego Brahmacharya and one may not enter in to Vānaprastha or āsa but one must enter *Gṛhasthāśrama*, because *Gṛhastha* is as essential for the sustenance of society as air is for the life. The persons in the other three stages are dependent on *Gṛhastha*’\(^{35}\). Even Kautilya has attached great value to *artha*. He considers it as the most important of the three, the other two being dependent on it. He says, “Material well being alone is supreme, for spiritual good and sensual pleasures depend on material well-being”\(^{36}\). Referring to the significance of *artha*, Kautilya remarked, “The source of the livelihood of men is wealth, in other words, the earth inhabited by men. The science which is the means of the attainment and protection of that earth is the science of *artha*”\(^{37}\).

There is little scope for any doubt that the significance of material well-being was realized at very early stage and all the law givers have emphasized its importance. Therefore, earning a livelihood, collecting wealth in the form of cattle, property, money, etc. for material prosperity and to in order to facilitate the discharge of worldly duties by righteous means was considered to be an appropriate action of man supported by dharma. This is amply illustrated from the rich material remains that the entire land of Punjab has yielded from Harappan age onwards. Not only
during the later Vedic period but even during the historic times as revealed by excavations at Taxila, the material prosperity was taken due care of.

**Kāma**

The third purushārtha in the trivarga is kāma. This is perhaps the most misunderstood word of all. It refers to the enjoyment of desirous things in life or fulfilling one’s wishes. It is generally explained as fulfillment of the desires of sensual pleasures and is construed to mean only the sexual enjoyment. This is a very narrow explanation of the term or even one can say the result of narrow and obsessed thinking. Even taking in the sense of sensual pleasures it has very wide meaning. Anything pertaining to senses is sensual. As such everything that pleases the mind and body is kāma. The lexicons define this word simply as ‘desire’ or ‘wish’. Pāṇini explains it by the example ‘Kamo me bhunjīta bhavān’ i.e. ‘my wish is you should eat’. Even the celebrated author on the subject, Vātsyāyana in his Kāmasūtra explains numerous fine arts as kalās that fall within the purview of this term. Thus the broad meaning of the term is fulfilment of all worthy desires of man in the world.

There is no denying that sexual desire is also a part of kāma. But it has to be carefully distinguished from lust. The latter has negative connotations whereas sexual desire is an essential part of the life of human beings for the sustenance and continuity of human race. From the earliest times it has been laid down by scriptures that procreation is one of the foremost duties of man. The Rgveda takes it as love or desire personified. The Atharvaveda also describes it in the same sense. It also describes it as the name of the god of love. Yāṣk also takes it in the sense of desire. He explains ‘kāmena kṣetāḥ’ as ‘prepared with desire’ (12.18). At another place it is explained with reference to lightening as ‘it shined when bringing the desired water for me from heaven’. Kalidāsa uses the expression santānakāmāya as desire for having offspring. It is interesting to note that the Mahābhārata at one place considers kāma as superior to dharma and artha. It says that as butter is superior to curds being the essence of the latter, likewise kāma is superior to both dharma and artha. Vātsyāyana takes kāma as a natural characteristic. He traces the origin and development of this world from kāma only and says that the way food produces several problems in the body but is essential for it similarly kāma cannot be given up despite of its been capable of having mental and social deformities. Thus it is clear
that the concept of *kāma* or the enjoyment of beautiful things in life was devised to
distinguish human beings from other creatures due to their developed organs of senses
and their capability of having aesthetic sense rather than fulfilling the sexual desires
that is an animal instinct.

**Moksha**

The ultimate goal of life was *moksha* i.e. emancipation from the cycle of birth
and death. According to the Indian philosophy and beliefs body is perishable but soul
is eternal. Man dies and is reborn according to his actions in the previous birth. This
cycle continues till the final emancipation which can be obtained only through the
righteous actions in life. It is called nirvāṇa in Buddhism. This is the end for which
the correct performance of the other three is means. Taken together *dharma, artha,
kāma* and *moksha* make life worthy of living for all human beings and must be
attained.

There is no reason to doubt the prevalence of the concept of fourfold
*purushārthas* in Punjab in ancient times, right from the early Vedic age. The picture
of the society that we get from the literary and archaeological sources provides ample
indications of a society that was highly advanced both materially and spiritually.
However, this does not mean it was a stagnant society. Interactions with the outside
world and coming of the foreigners to this land did affect the society at large and there
were times when the orthodox censured vehemently the behaviour of the heterodox of
this land, like we find mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. But it only applied to a
section of society towards the end of the period under discussion. Over a period of
time several social changes were gradually assimilated in the setup of this frontier
state.

**The Saṃskāras**

The *Saṃskāras* are very specific to the Hindu way of life and it may not be
possible to explain them in one word. It has been very aptly remarked that, ‘The word
*Saṃskāra* defies every attempt at its correct translation into English’. Neither
‘ceremony’ nor ‘ritual’ or any other such word correctly conveys the sense in which
the word *Saṃskāra* has been used by the Hindus. A better attempt is to call it
equivalent of the English ‘sacraments’ but that too would remain a halfway attempt as
sacrament denotes ‘religious ceremony or act regarded as outward visible sign of
inward and spiritual grace’. According to Raj Bali Pandey it overlaps many other
religious spheres in Sanskrit that do not fall under the Saṃskāras such as śuddhi or
purification, prāyaśchita or atonement, etc.49 Derived from the √sāmkṛghaṇ it has
been variously used even within Sanskrit literature in the sense of education,
cultivation, training, refinement, perfection and grammatic purity, etc. It may be
explained as ‘religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body,
mind and intellect of an individual’50. Various ceremonies performed for an individual
from conception to death, each signifying a specific purpose and step in life are
included in the Saṃskāras.

The word does not find mention anywhere in the Vedic literature. It would be
presumptuous to say that they did not exist in the early period of our civilization as we
have references to ceremonies like the initiation into education called upanayana and
the performance of funeral rites, etc. from the time of the Ṛgveda itself but it seems
that their codification was done at a much later period. Even in the Sūtras they are not
used to describe what we find in the classical Sanskrit literature. Even there is no
consensus about their number in the Grhyasūtras which varies from eleven to
eighteen. However, at present the most acceptable lists include sixteen Saṃskāras to
be performed through life. They are: Pre-natal rites, Garbhādhāna (conception),
Puṇīsavāna (quickening of male child), Simantonayana (hair-parting); childhood
rites, Jāta-karma (birth ceremonies), Nishkrāmāṇa (first outing), Nāmakaraṇa (name
giving), Anna-prāśana (first feeding of cereal food), Chūḍa-karaṇa (tonsure),
Karaṇavedha (piercing of the ears); educational rites, Vidyārambha (learning of
alphabet), Upanayana (initiation), Vedārāmbha (beginning of the study of the Veda),
Kesānta (shaving of beard) and Samāvantana (completion of education or the end of
studentship); Householder’s life, Vivāha (marriage ceremonies); and the last rites
called Antyesṭi (funeral ceremonies). Some of the later works have included
Vānaprastha and āsa as the Saṃskāras51 but they do not find place in the classical
lists.

Each of these Saṃskāras was performed with elaborate ceremonies and had
their own significance in the life of an individual. The details of the ceremonies,
however, differed according to different texts and changed with the passage of time. This is perhaps because the *Sanskāras* are based on performance of rituals as per tradition rather than base on any codified texts. They form part of the *Grhasūtras* and not of *dharmasūtras*. A historical discussion on them in ancient times would be superfluous as they form part and parcel of the life of each Hindu and have been followed to the present times. Punjab was no exception in this context.
Notes and References:

4. vi.21.
5. iv.2.22.
6. I.3.
7. For details see infra.
9. Ibid.
10. *The Age of Imperial Unity,* 554; also see McCrindle, J. W., *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature,* 69-71.
13. Ibid., 170.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 170.
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
21. II.5.11.
23. 2.2.57.
24. 3.33.8-9.
25. II.224.

Religion and Society, 104.

VI.92.


IV.14.

79.7.

Cf. *Mbh.*, Śāntiparva; *Manusmṛti*.

*Manusmṛti*, III.77-78; VI.89-90.

1.7.6-7.

Arthaśāstra, 15.1.1-2. There is some difference of opinion on the meaning of *artha* as given by Kauṭilya. K. P. Jayaswal has taken it to mean ‘human population’ as he takes *ṛṣṭi* in the sense of *vartana* i.e. ‘existence’. Cf. *Hindu Polity*, 5, note 3. On the other hand D. R. Bhandarkar denies that *artha* here is one of the *trīṣṭa*. He thinks it is not in the sense of *vārttā* that is taken by Kauṭilya but in the sense of *ḍaṇḍanīti* that the word has been used. *Some Aspects of Ancient Hindu Polity*, 12-13. R. P. Kangle, however, takes *ṛṣṭi* in the sense of livelihood and appears to be correct in his rendering. *The Kautilya Arthaśāstra*, III, 1-2.


iii, 3.153.

x.129.4.

ix; xii

iii. 25.1.

*Nirukta*, 12.18, 11.36.

Raghuvaṁśam, 2.65; 3.67.


Gupta, Devendra Kumar, *Prachina Bharatiya Samaja evam Arthavyavastha*, 150.

Karṇāparva, 44.


E.g. Dayananda Saraswati, *Satyārthaprakāśa*.