

Chapter – VI

Artha as Paramapurushartha: A Critical Study

The present portion with the concept of *artha* in Indian Philosophy and an effort has been made to show that it is a value concept. The first part of this chapter deals with the various philosophical meanings of the term. In this connection, it has pointed out that *artha* has got wider connotation, which is implicitly found in different philosophical literature. The second part of this chapter deals with how *artha* plays an important role in promoting human welfare. In this part an effort has been made to use the term *artha* in other senses i.e. economy of enjoyment, economy of labour, economy of recreation, economy of time etc., which is not explicitly found in philosophical literature. In the concluding part some philosophical observations have been made from our standpoint. It includes the relation between *dharma* and *artha*, inevitability of *artha* in the attainment of *dharma* and *kama*, reducibility of *kama* into *artha*, etc. We have confined our discussion on the *trivarga*, alone which has got this worldly value i.e. social value. Here the term ‘economy’ is used in the sense of balance. ‘Economy of labour or enjoyment’ means ‘adherence of that quantity of labour or enjoyment’ by which our life becomes ‘meaningful’, which refers to a balance life. A ‘meaningful’ (*arthavan*) life is a ‘balanced’ life, which can save us from *anartha* or harmfulness. That which is harmless to us is also called *artha* (as opposed to *anartha*). Again, the object, which is associated with harmlessness or wellbeing becomes ‘meaningful’ (*arthavan*) to our life. The strong sense of economy in all spheres of life is connected with our wellbeing and hence it is ‘meaningful’ or *arthavan* to us.

Artha, which is enumerated as one of the *purusarthas* has been described as having economic value in Indian tradition and it has been taken, as an aid to fulfill human wants. A human being has been described as embodiment of complex desires. Any type of desire presupposes the motive for having certain object. An individual thinks certain object as desirable and he inclines to attain it (*istasadhanatajnanam*).

The economic sense is induced by Manu again when he advised the social beings to save for the future. He has classified man into various types according to their rate of savings. Those who are desirous of maintaining their livelihood for three years or more from the accumulated food are called *Kusaladhanyaka*. In the same way, he has described others in various ways after considering their respective savings of crops etc.¹ That Manu was not at all opponent to the policy of saving is again evident from the following statement. An individual who is desirous of happiness receives satisfaction in his mind and refrain from having more money which is not essential on account of the fact that satisfaction is the root of all happiness.² Manu has also pointed out in connection with the discussion on the duties of woman in a society that women should not spend whatever they want (*byaye camuktahastaya*)³. That the economic value is given due honour is evidenced from the recognition of *varta* as a form of *vidya* by Vatsyasyana and Manu.⁴ The agriculture, poultry and commerce (which is technically called *varta*) have been received much attention and emphasis because social beings may maintain themselves by way of adopting these. Kamandaka in his *Nitisara* admits that when *varta* is destroyed, this world is surely dead, though it seems to breath.⁵

From the above deliberation it is shown that economic consciousness is highly essential for smooth running of the family and society. One can preserve what one has earned by observing moderation in enjoyment. 'Moderation in enjoyment' means 'to be

economic' in enjoyment. The importance of restriction lies on the fact that it does not permit an individual to enjoy as much as he can. The restriction makes him balanced by way of resisting him from the excessive enjoyment. If enjoyment goes on for an endless period of time without any restriction or if suffering continues for a long time without intervention, both the situations lead us to the disbalance. Just as excessive enjoyment is 'non-economic, poverty or excessive suffering is also non-economic'. Hence, restriction has got a regulative value in our day-to-day life. 'To regulate' means 'to destroy irregularities in our life'. Hence, regulation (*niyama*) either economics or other fields comes from restriction (*niyantrana*). For the sake of others' well-being an individual puts restrictions on his own personal freedom. An individual should resist his temptation and impose restriction on his own freedom after considering bad consequences of it. The disciplined freedom is a real one as it is associated with our wellbeing. The imposition of restriction on enjoyment or minimization of enjoyment conjoins him with his own well-being. What distinguishes a man from a beast is that he recognizes universal interdependence in a society and orders his life accordingly. He establishes conventions, mutual understanding, laws of conduct for the welfare of the society, thereby imposing restriction on himself for the benefit of the whole.

The contemporary thinkers like Rabindranath Tagore etc. have also admitted the economic value of the above-mentioned type. According to Rabindranath, the fundamental thing for the performance of high austerity in the whole world is to curb the enjoyment and to curtail the desire of happiness. We should go in such a way so that we do not lean towards a particular side in which there is too much burden without adhering to harmony.⁶ In other words, the minimization and limitation of enjoyment help us to maintain harmony. This phenomenon may be described as economy of consumption.

It has been stated in *Manusamhita* in the context of describing the duties of a king that hunting, dice-playing etc. are described as vices or *vyasanas* of the King. The main contention of this description is that if a king engages himself too much in haunting, dice-playing etc., it would come under *vyasana*, but otherwise not. That is too much for absorption towards these is prohibited. This hunting etc. may be tolerable in a king's life if they are performed 'economically' i.e. after maintaining balance or limit. In the *Bhasya* Medhatithi says that drinking or dice playing may be taken as a *vyasana* if someone is addicted to it. Hence, addition towards object is prohibited but not occasional drinking or dice-playing.⁷ Hence, an economic enjoyment is always desirable. In the same way, too much charity or penance is not also advisable, because it may lead to loss of money or health. From the above discussion it follows that an uncontrolled and unregulated life of love and pleasure (*kama*) is evil and is, therefore, not desirable. Rabindranath Tagore observes that nothing can be made beautiful or meaningful if there is no limit and hence, limit has a prominent role in beautification. Ugliness or meaninglessness in life lie there where there is limitation or restriction. Where there is this sense of economy, there is beauty. Hence, an individual who adheres to limitation in every field is always associated with his well-being which is called *artha* (as opposed to *anartha*) in our life.⁸

Artha, we think, is the fundamental factor in all-human pursuits. Hence, *dharma* and *kama* are subordinated to it. Morality (*dharma*) and pleasure (*kama*) cannot remain in a society if there is no economic stability or power. The social organization or social good always follows if every social being realizes the economic value. That which promotes life and that which is conducive to the maintenance of life is called *artha*.⁹ Survival in this world is a value. Hence, no moral and spiritual matter can deny the permanent importance of life.

If someone does not survive at all, how can he maintain moral and spiritual life? Hence, *artha* comes first for our own survival.

Dharma at the initial stage cannot step its foot if an individual has no *artha* in the sense of wealth for survival. For the acquisition and maintenance of the earth *artha* is inevitable.¹⁰ In the context the term 'earth' which is referred to by the term '*artha*' by Koutilya denotes both the source of income and human society supported by it.¹¹ From this, it does not follow that *dharma* is not essential. When an individual acquires money or wealth, which is more than his own necessity, he should utilize it for the service of mankind. Otherwise, it would be treated as evil. Hence, the economic system needs some social or moral control for achieving maximum human good or for achieving a society free from exploitation etc.

It may argued that there is no necessity of *dharma* for the achievement of social good, because strong 'sense of economy' (in the sense mentioned earlier) belonging to the social beings in respect of enjoyment will bring social good automatically. That is, the strong economic sense of an individual will give rise to him a pattern of life by which other social beings will automatically be associated with the good. Hence, there is no need of controlling factor like *dharma* etc.

In reply, it can be said that the strong sense of economy may bring social good as well as individual's good no doubt in some cases. But there are situations, when an individual may think about the social good voluntarily, how would this idea of doing 'social good' come? When someone extends himself or his own self to other social beings voluntarily, the tendency to serve people does not merely from the sense of economy but from morality also. Hence, both *dharma* and *artha* are intermingled though initially *artha* in the sense of wealth becomes prominent. That is why, it has been said that *dharma* is *artha*

and by *dharma artha* is earned. The one is means and support of the other and vice-versa. In the previous case when an individual is doing social good by way of leading an economic life, there is no role of good will as well-being follows automatically and hence there is no role of *dharma*. But in the latter case when there is a good will to serve others or to associate others with their well-being, there is certainly the role of *dharma*.

To our opinion, *kama* may be incorporated in *artha*. That is, any type of pleasure or happiness may be called *artha* in a wider sense as mentioned above. The *artha* refers to the notion of good. That which is worthy of being aimed at or desired (*ista*) is also called *artha*. In other words, *artha* is opposite to *anartha* (which causes our harm). As pleasure or happiness (*kama*) is worthy of being aimed at and as it has connection with our good in the form of satisfaction, it may be described as *artha*. If someone finds pleasure in performing undesirable works, it comes under *anartha* (but not *anartha*), as it is *dharmaviruddha* (not in accordance with *dharma*). This point may find support in the Purvamimamsa. According to them, *dharma* is always associated with the good. If any ritualistic action leads one to the non-desired situation (*anartha*), it is not at all *dharma* which is indicated through the incorporation of the term *artha* in the sutra “*Codonalaksano’ rtho Dharmah*”.¹² That which creates *priti* (pleasure or happiness) etc. is desired (*artha*), because *priti* is that in which an individual finds pleasure.¹³

Artha, which is in accordance with *dharma*, is nothing but pleasure (*kama*). Hence, there is no necessity of admitting *kama* other than *artha*. *Kama* or pleasure has been used as *artha* in various places of Sanskrit literature as in the case of *putrарtha* etc. Here the hedonistic value of this is not neglected, but it is stated that *artha* can fulfill both economic and hedonistic value. What *artha* gives us is always pleasant and good as opposed to evil (*anartha*).¹⁴

In the phenomenal world the moral and economic value are very much essential, because they have got a prominent role in bringing social harmony or justice. Hence, this value has much bearing upon the society. We may conclude after mentioning the view of Sri Aurobindo who has shared the above-mentioned idea. According to him, it is not proper for mankind to be the slave of money, as it creates problem in bringing *divyabhava* due to having addiction to it. It is not proper at the same time for a man to reject the importance of money. Without the help of it an individual cannot proceed for awakening *divyabhava* in others. He observes: "Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action, it belongs to the divine. But like other powers of the divine it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego or held by *Asurik* influence perverted to their purpose. This is indeed one of the three forces – power, wealth and sex – that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the *Asura* and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are most often possessors rather than its possessors; few escape entirely a certain distorting influence stamped on it by its long seizure and pervasion by the *Asura*. For this reason most spiritual aspects were on a complete self-control, detachment and renunciation of all bondage to wealth and of all personal and egoistic desire for its possession. Some even put a ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and barrenness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is an error, it leaves the power in the hands of the holistic forces.... you must neither turn with an ascetic shrinking from the money power, the means of it give and the objects it brings, nor cherish a *rajasik* attachment to them or a spirit enslaving self-indulgence in their gratification. Regard wealth simply as a power to be won back for the Mother and placed at

her service.¹⁵ From the above discussion, it is proved that *artha* is a valuable human pursuit and hence it is to be taken as most valuable one if the term '*artha*' is taken in a liberal sense.

Artha can also be depicted as a highest *Purusartha* even if it is taken in the sense of property or money. *Artha*, if earned through righteous means, is equivalent to Divinity, just as *Kama* practiced through righteous means is called Divinity as evidenced in the *Bhagvadgita* – '*Dharmaviruddhah Kamo'smi*'. Hence '*artha*' cannot be neglected in our life, because it has a tremendous value. Sri Aurobindo has taken it as a form of *Mahalaksmi*. Sri Aurobindo observes: "Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on the earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action, it belongs to the Divine. But like other powers of the Divine it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower. Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego and held one of the three forces – power, wealth, sex, that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the *Asura* and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of the wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessor; few escape entirely a long seizure and pervasion by the *Asura*. For this reason, most spiritual disciplines insist on complete self-control, detachment, and renunciation of all bondage to wealth and of all personal and egoistic desire for its possession. Some even put ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and barrenness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is error; it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the divine life is the supra-mental way for the *Sadhaka*."

Even *Dharma* cannot come into being if there is no economic stability. *Dharma* in the sense of morality is formed in a person if he is provided with minimum food or drink. If a man does not get food for his sustenance, there does not arise any question of morality.

Any moral question falls flat on the persons who remain hungry. We may recall here the view of Swami Vivekananda who first advocated – ‘first bread, then religion’. He said, “What we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the Advaita into the material world. “First bread and then religion”. (*Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, p. 432; Advaita Ashram, Mayavati, 1940). He thinks that all the forces that are working in this body have been generated from food. If fasting is adopted, our body will get weak leading to the loss of physical forces. Due to the gradual loss of physical force the mental forces become lost as a result of which we cannot think of undertaking any course of reasoning. To him – “We have, therefore, to take care what sort of food we eat at the beginning, and when we have got strength enough, when our practice is well-advanced, we need not be so careful in this respect”. (CWS, Vol-3, p-136). That is why we thought of amalgamating ‘*Islamic body and Vedantic thought*’. We generally try to convince ordinary persons about religion when they actually need food. Dogmas or theories about religion will fall flat upon other if their hunger is not appeased.

The above view of Vivekananda finds support in our tradition, which says – ‘*Sariram adyam khalu Dharmasadhanam*’, i.e. for practicing religion body has to be given priority. Sound health alone can give sound thinking. This sound health is related to food. To set minimum food or bread we need money.

For the performance of *Dharma* in the sense of rituals, we need sound body and sound mind. That is why; *artha* is not always creating *anartha* to human being. Considering such importance of it, it is put in the second place in the list of *Purusarthas*.

It is said by Sankara that money is always to be considered as object of harmfulness (*artham anartham bhavayet nityam*). If an individual always thinks of getting property, it will lead him to the state of harmfulness. The attainment of money can increase the greed of

a man, which makes him involved in attaining more. It actually leads us to the state of harmfulness.

In response to the above problem, it may be said that property is an indispensable factor in our life, but it should have limit. We should not want money that is not at all essential for maintaining our livelihood. It has been suggested by our ancient seers one should long for money, which is necessary for his basic needs. If he desires money more than his basic needs, he is a thief. The *Srimadbhagavadgita* tells us that the extra property should be distributed to others. If he keeps this to him without giving to the needy persons for his own enjoyment, which is not at all essential, he is to be considered as a thief and be punished accordingly. Considering this aspect, it is said in the *Isopanisad* – ‘*Ma grdhah kasyasviddhanam*’ (Do not be greedy with others properties).

Artha is very much valuable because it may be taken as both end and means. When someone tries to attain wealth, it is an end no doubt considering its importance in our daily life, but at the same time, this has to be obtained through honest means i.e. *anartha* like getting money through bribery, robbery etc. *Artha* or wealth is to be obtained through the means associated with well-being (*artha*). If this mean becomes auspicious, the role of *Dharma* becomes redundant as *artha* serves the same purpose. This view finds support in the *Arthasamgraha* where *Dharma* is defined as *vedaprati-padyaprayojanavadartho Dharmah*, i.e. *Dharma* is taken as equivalent to *artha* having utility in performing activities prescribed in the Vedas. Here, *Dharma* is taken as equivalent to *artha* but not *anartha* in the sense of well-being – both material and spiritual. Moreover, if the religious activities or mortality (*Dharma*) depends on economic stability (*artha*) and if *artha* can provide all types of well-being to man, it should be taken as superior to other *Purusarthas*, even to *Dharma*.

References

1. *Manusamhita*, 4/7
2. *Ibid*, 4/13
3. *Ibid*, 5/150
4. *Vatsyayanabhasya* on Sutra no. 1.1.1.
5. *Nitisara*, 3/12
6. Rabindranath Tagore: *Santiniketan. Rabindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 12, p. 438, W.B. Govt.
7. *Vyasanabdena atyanto' bhyasa etadvargavisaye usyate, atasca abhyasa pratisidhyate, no tu isadasevanam*, Madhutithi on *Manusamhita*- 7/47.
8. "Sima nahile sunder hai na ei janyai sima Praman mane naye rup sei kurupa, taha samagrer virodhi". *Vicitra Pravandha*, Visva-Bharati, p. 122.
9. "*Prthivyah labhe palane ca yavaniyarthasastra*", *Arthasastra*- 1.111.5.
10. *Ibid*.
11. *Ibid*, 180.1.1.
12. *Mamamsasasutra*- 1.1.2.
13. "*Yasmin priti purusasya tasya lipsarthalaksana avibhaktatvat. Mimamsasutra*- 4.1.1.
14. *Arthasastra*- 3/5.
15. Sri Aurobindo: *The Mother*, Vol. 25, Pondicherry, 1972, pp. 10-12.