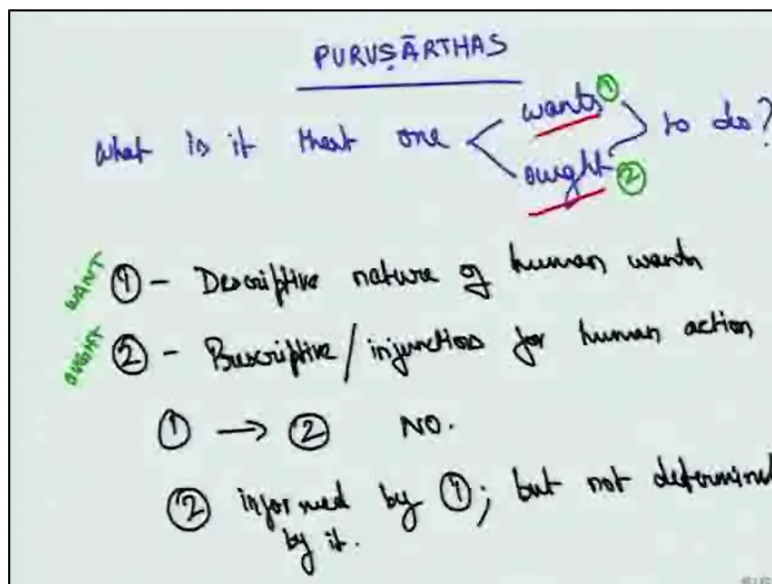


**Ethics**  
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**Module No. #01**  
**Lecture No. #29**  
**Purusharthas**

Hello, everyone. Today, we are going to talk about, the Theory of Purusharthas. Or, what Purusharthas, which deals with Ethics in Indian Philosophy.

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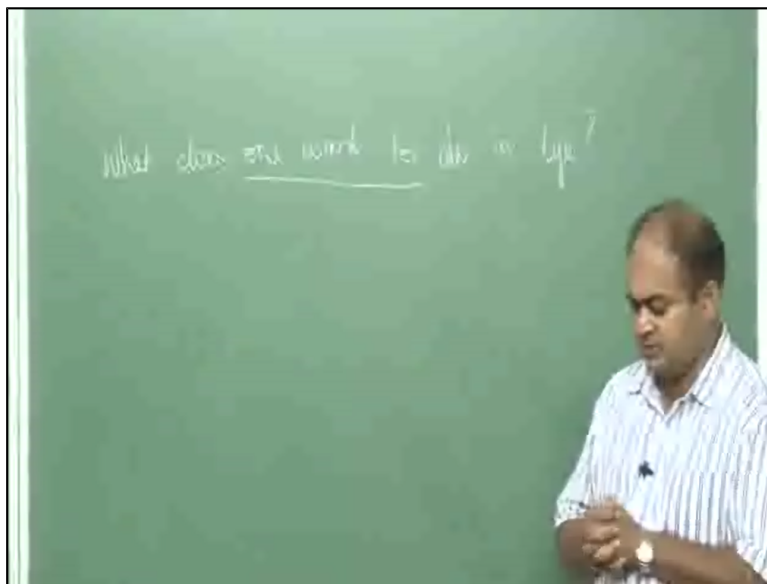
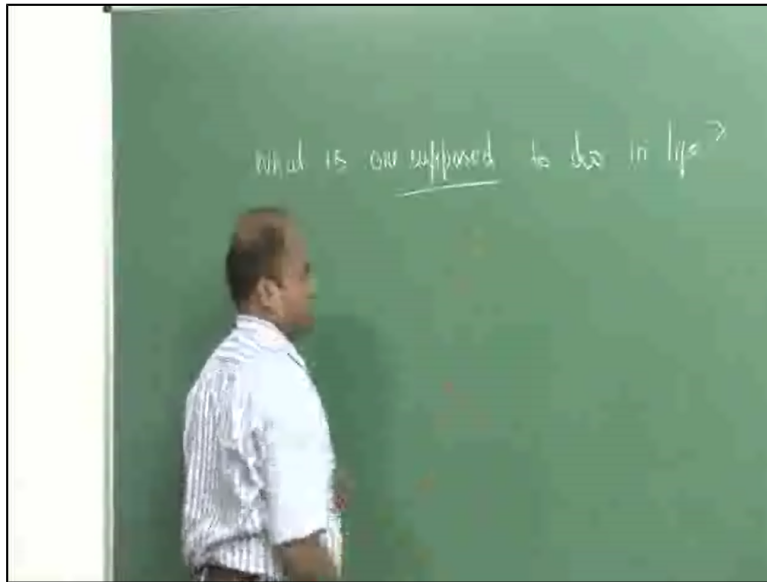


Now, if you look at the screen, Purusharthas is, well, written in English, with the diacritical marks, that you see around, S and A. So, what is Purusharthas, and what does it mean? Well. Let us say, now coming to human existence. Now, let us go back traditionally, to Indian Philosophy. Because, we are talking about, Purusharthas in Ethics. Because, Purusharthas deal with the notion of Ethics, as we understand it today, in Indian Philosophy. Now, what should one do? Or, what does one want to do? Now, these are two different questions.

But, these are the essential crux questions of life. Now, let us take a mystical flashback to, say an Indian Gurukul, or a Place of Learning of Ancient India. What is it that, students learnt? Like today in schools, we are learning about Science, about Literatures, about Social History, about Languages. So, what was the Syllabus, or what was the Curriculum, or what was the issues that

were dealt with in, Ancient Indian Philosophy. One of the crucial issues dealt with, in far more importance than what it is dealt with today, is that, what is one supposed to do.

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Well. On the board, you find two questions, right now. The first question here, that well, asks, what is one supposed to do in life. And, the second question asks, that well, what does one want to do in life. Now, this was a crucial component, of the engagement of Ancient Indian Philosophy, that following the various Ashrams in life. The Brahmacharya Ashrams, was spent in learning. And, what was it that, one learnt? Well.

One essential component, that was to be learned is that, what is worth doing. Or, what is the right thing to do in life. Or, what does one do in life. What is one supposed to do in life. Now, before we go on to that, let me briefly bring you about, the difference between the two questions, on the board that you see, right now. What is worth doing? And, what one is supposed to do? Now, what do these two question signify?

Well. When we asked, that well, what is it that you want to do, and what is it that you are supposed to do. Now, let us take a look at this, over here. The difference between, that one wants, and that one ought to do. So, what do these two different words, tend out to mean. Well. This is a crucial distinction, that is to be made, to understand the moral domain. That, what one wants to do, if you label it as 1. And, what one ought to do, if you label it as 2.

Well. Say, 1 talks about the descriptive nature of human wants. Whereas, 2 or Ought, talks about the prescriptive, or injunctions for human action. Now, let me write this here, so that, it is clear to you. This is what, we talked about was, Want. And, this is what, we talked about was, Ought. Now, the descriptive nature of human wants is, well, what we want, what is it that we desire. It is only about, what we desire. And, does that make it automatically, what we should be wanting.

Well. There is what is the gap, which many Ethicists in the Western parlance have called, the Naturalistic Philosophy. Can we infer, a descriptive nature of human want to a, prescriptive nature of human action. Well. From the context of Purusharthas, the answer from that, can we infer 1 to 2. Well. The answer is clearly no. That well, 2 is a separate independent domain, that is to be worked out by, the Theoreticians, or the Intelligency of the time.

So, Purusharthas are claiming, that giving us a prescriptive, or an injunctive notion, for human action. And, they are informed by, 2 is informed by 1, but not determined by it. Now, let us try to comprehend, the crucial difference between these two. What is it to be informed by it. And, what is it to be determine, human actions by the description. Now, let us take look at this.

Suppose, teacher has administered a project work, or a test, to the students, where they have to

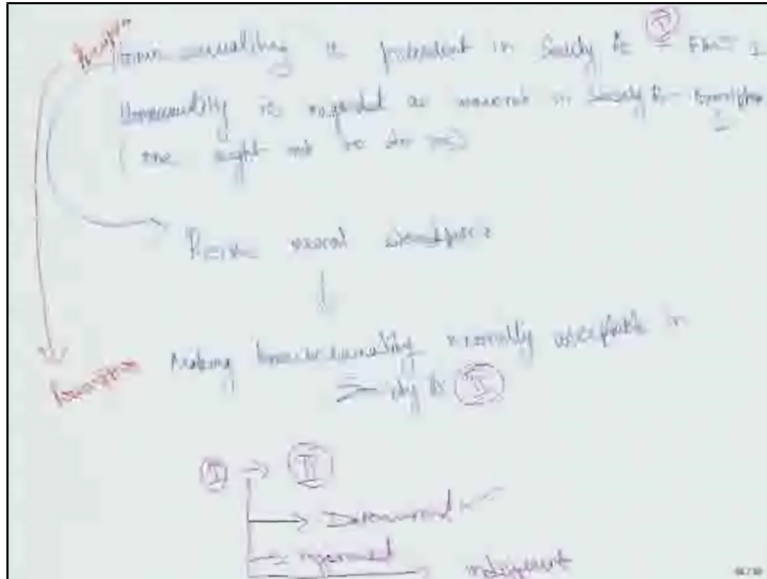
write an essay, about some particular topic of their liking. Now, if the teacher finds, that well, that many students or few students have, copied from various sources or plagiarised, and were have not been original in their writing. Then, what does the teacher do. Now, we see, that well, most of the people have plagiarised.

And, if the teacher excuses plagiarism considering, that well, this is perhaps a younger lot of a class, and they are doing the project for the first time. Because, I find a lot of them have plagiarised, therefore I will not deduct, or make any punishment, for plagiarism. Then, what the teacher tends to be arriving it as, is arriving from a descriptive state of affairs, to revising his own prescription. Perhaps, this would make a greater sense. Another example, that would perhaps elaborate this even better, is when we talk about, say Homosexuality.

Now, considerably simplifying the argument, to provide a good analogy for this, Is-Ought distinction that we are talking about, let me present an analogy, which is perhaps too simplified to be a, very accurate representation of reality. But, it will nevertheless hold, make the distinction clear. Now, we find that, Homosexuality is prevalent in a society. And, the description is that, Homosexuality is prevalent in society.

So, if being informed by that description, and it is a moral wrong in that particular society. But, seeing the prevalence of Homosexuality in the society, if the governance revises the moral claim, or the moral vision, or a moral stand on Homosexuality, then we are seeing a case, where description is determining prescription. So, if we take a look at the sense, that well, Homosexuality is prevalent in Society-A.

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Right say. And, this is a Fact-1. Homosexuality is a regarded as immoral, in Society-A. That is, one ought not to do so. Now, this is say, Prescription-1. So now, being informed by this fact over here, if we make a change, and we find that well, because homosexual is prevalent, so we revise moral standpoint to lead to, making Homosexuality morally acceptable in Society-A. Now, this is an example where, we are moving from a description, to a prescription.

That is by finding, how things are. So, we move from, there to determining, how things ought to be, or what things seem to be. Now, being informed, so let us call this, say 1, and this 2. Now, how does, 1 lead to 2. Well. This can be of two serve. One, that it is determined. And, this is that, it is informed. When I say determined, well, seeing the prevalence of Homosexuality, if the governance directly makes Homosexuality, morally acceptable in Society-A. Then well, it is being determined by it.

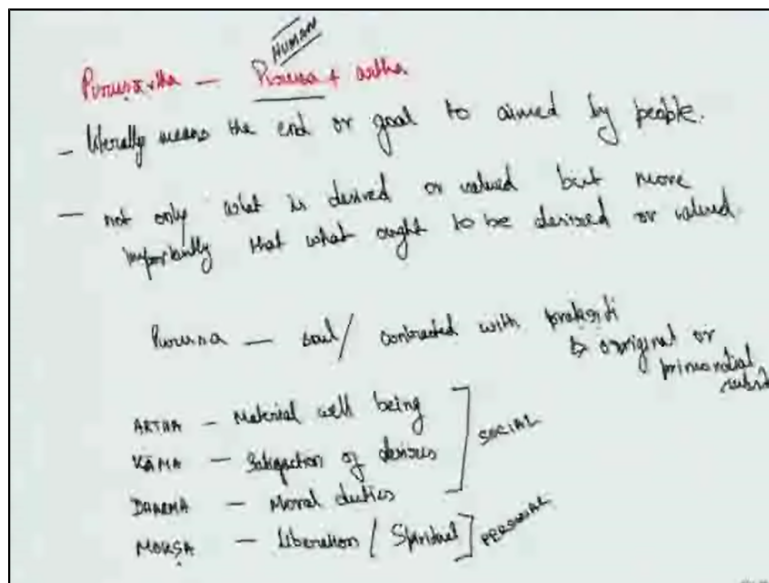
Whereas, seeing Homosexuality is prevalent in Society-A, if the governance is trying to find out, that well, something is prevalent, let us review our standpoint. If it is prevalent, may be, why is it so. Or, we need to revise its moral standpoint, that is, informed. And of course, there can be a third option, which is, it is indifferent. That well, our rulebook says so, and therefore, prevalence in society does not determine, whether we should even consider, a moral revision, on that particular matter.

Now, considering a simple thing, let us say, that well, if I am a shopkeeper. And, I am stocking up some toothpastes for sale. Now, in one month, I see that, none of these toothpastes have been sold. Whereas, a toothpaste of another brand, has been sold. Now, it is logical for me, as a shopkeeper, not to stock the toothpaste, that does not sell, and rather to stock more of the toothpaste, that sells. It is a very simple business claim.

That well, I see the descriptive state of affairs, I see the data, I see the statistics, and from there, I infer that well, the toothpaste that I need to stack, and the toothpaste I need to get rid of. But, in the case of values, or morals, or policies, that govern a society, or even an individual, it is not simply a case of description governing prescription, especially in the Indian philosophical outlook.

So, if I say, that well, I want to be happy. And, lying very often gets me things, in a much easier fashion. And therefore, I am happy. So, lying is right. Well. That is, this kind of a jump, from a description to a prescription, is unacceptable in Indian Philosophy. So, now coming back to, what do we mean by, the Purusharthas in Indian Philosophy.

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Now well, as you can infer, it is a combination of two words, Purush, and Artha. But, before we go to that, well, Purushartha literally means, the end, or goal, to be aimed at by people. So, considering the explanation, that just preceded this, well, we can clearly understand, what

Purushartha means is that, it is not only what is desired or valued, but more importantly that what ought to be desired or valued.

So, when I utter Purushartha, it would mean that well, what is the objective of human existence. What is the aim, or what are the goals of human existence? Now, that is a very broad question. But nevertheless, it is a very crucial question in determining, how human lives are lived in societies, or in isolation. So, Purushartha would mean, that well, what is the goal, that is worth being aimed at.

Well. What this goal is. We all want something. But, what is worth wanting, is what makes the sophisticated discrimination between, thought through life, and an un-thought through life. So, when I say Purushartha, I do not mean, that well, what human beings want. But perhaps, more accurately, what human beings ought to want. So, the goal of life. Everybody would have a goal of life.

For everybody would perhaps, have desires. But, those desires are, Purushartha understood in an extremely broad sense, when we talk about any object of human desire as Purushartha. But, strictly speaking, when we talk about Purushartha, in the philosophical and moral context, we talk about goals, that are worth having. So, Purushartha would mean, what are the goals, that are worth having.

Now, first clarification, that I would like to make right away is that, when we talk about the word Purusa over here, this does not mean male, or it does not have to do anything with being male, or about being a man. In fact, Purusa here, is to be understood as, the soul. Or, in a way contrasted with, if the Sankhya Philosophy is to be followed, contrasted with, what is known as Prakriti. So, Purusa is that soul, or that factor that is contrasted with, the rest of the world out there.

So, with Prakriti, what we mean is that, is often regarded as the original, or primordial substance. This is a metaphysical classification, that need not aware you now. So, Purusa over here means, that which is the human component in us. So, the rational soul component, that is in us. So, Purusharthas would actually turn out to mean, that well, what ought to be the object of human

desire.

So here, Purusa should be understood only as human, and nothing to do with a gender classification. Now, let me give you of the brief introduction to, what are the kinds of Purusharthas, which many of you would perhaps be aware of already, if raised in the Indian milieu. The classical Purusharthas, that are made out is, well, first is in fact, there is no. I would not like to introduce you to a hierarchy, right now.

So, it is Artha or material well-being, Kama or satisfaction of desires, as moral duties. Or, duties that come to you as, being a human being, or in particular position of yours in life. And, the final one is Moksha, which is regarded as the highest Purusharthas. And it is, what we can now understand as, Liberation. Okay. Now, as you can see, we can make a classification here, that these are social. Whereas, this is intensely personal, or spiritual, or individualistic. In fact, very often this has been.