

A Sociological Analysis of the Purushartha Framework: Reimagining Balanced Social Living with the lens of IKS and NEP 2020

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Abstract: *This research paper critically examines the contemporary relevance of the ancient Indian sociological framework of 'Purushartha'—comprising Dharma (Ethical Foundation), Artha (Material Prosperity), Kama (Emotional Fulfillment), and Moksha (Self-Actualization). In an era characterized by the "crisis of modernity," global societies are increasingly grappling with hyper-materialism, social fragmentation, and deteriorating mental health. Against this backdrop, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emerges as a transformative instrument, advocating for a holistic pedagogical shift rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Employing a **qualitative content analysis** of classical texts and current policy documents, this study utilizes a **structural-functionalist lens** to analyze how the four pillars of Purushartha provide a holistic roadmap for reconciling individual aspirations with collective social stability. By challenging Eurocentric frameworks, this study highlights how traditional values can balance material success with ethical depth. It concludes that embedding Purushartha-based principles within the education system is essential for developing resilient global citizens. This approach ensures that 21st-century professional achievement does not come at the cost of moral responsibility or environmental sustainability.*

Keywords: *Purushartha, NEP 2020, Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Structural-Functionalism, Value-based Education*

1. Introduction

1.1. The Sociological Context: Hyper-modernity and Social Anomie

Contemporary global society is currently navigating what sociologists describe as 'Hyper-modernity'—a phase characterized by rapid technological advancement but significant social fragmentation. According to the functionalist theories of Emile Durkheim, when a society's moral regulations fail to keep pace with economic changes, it falls into a state of 'Social Anomie' or normlessness. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes this vacuum of values and seeks to address it by reintegrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the mainstream pedagogical discourse.

1.2. Purushartha as a Framework for Social Capital

From a sociological perspective, the ancient Indian doctrine of 'Purushartha' is not merely a spiritual guide but a sophisticated mechanism for building 'Social Capital'.

Dharma functions as the 'Normative Order' or the collective conscience that maintains social cohesion.

Artha (Prosperity) and Kama (Emotional Desires), while representing individual agency, are socio-economically sustainable only when regulated by the ethical boundaries of Dharma. This balance ensures that material growth does not lead to social exploitation or environmental degradation.



1.3. Problem Statement: The Crisis of Eurocentric Pedagogy

The Indian education system has long been skewed by a colonial legacy that values economic productivity (*Artha*) over moral character. This narrow focus has created a high-stress 'performance society,' leading to social crises like corruption and environmental degradation, and a sense of alienation among youth. There is a critical need to re-center these ancient values to address the vacuum of ethics in the 21st-century. The NEP 2020 aims to fix this imbalance by shifting the focus from 'producing workers' to 'nurturing humans.' By integrating ancient values with modern learning, it reclaims *Moksha*—defined as intellectual freedom and self-actualization—as the core objective of education."

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to re-frame the Purushartha pillars within the lexicon of modern sociology. It aims to analyze how the revitalization of IKS through NEP 2020 can provide a counter-narrative to the prevailing crisis of values, eventually leading to a more balanced and ethically grounded social order-

To examine the contemporary relevance of Purushartha in balancing individual aspirations with social stability.

To explore how integrating Dharma and Moksha into modern curricula can address the ethical vacuum and mental health crises of the 21st century.

To synthesize the role of NEP 2020 as a mechanism for 'Re-Socialization' by mapping the Purushartha framework onto contemporary pedagogical practices.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a Qualitative Secondary Research design, utilizing a Documentary Analysis approach. Since the research seeks to interpret the convergence of ancient philosophical constructs (IKS) with modern educational directives (NEP 2020), a qualitative lens is most suitable for capturing the nuances of "meaning" and "social value" embedded in these texts.

2.2. Data Collection and Sources

The data for this study is derived from high-quality secondary sources, categorized as follows:

Policy Documents: The official *National Education Policy 2020* (Ministry of Education) and *UGC Guidelines on IKS (2023)* serve as the primary legal and structural texts.

Classical Sociological Texts: Sociological interpretations of the *Purusharthas* from scholars like P.H. Prabhu, S. Radhakrishnan, and M.N. Srinivas.

Scholarly Articles: Peer-reviewed journals in the fields of *Sociology of Education*, *Indian Philosophy*, and *Sustainable Development* retrieved from databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Shodhganga.

2.3. Analytical Technique: Qualitative Content Analysis

The study utilizes Thematic Content Analysis. The researchers systematically reviewed the selected documents to identify recurring themes such as "Ethics (*Dharma*)", "Livelihood (*Artha*)", "Holistic Development", and "Social Cohesion." These themes were then cross-referenced with modern sociological theories, specifically Structural-Functionalism and Social Capital Theory, to evaluate their contemporary relevance.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature regarding Purushartha and its sociological implications can be categorized into three distinct thematic areas:

3.1. Classical Perspectives on Social Organization

Traditional scholars like P.H. Prabhu (1940) in his seminal work *Hindu Social Organization* argue that the Purusharthas are not merely individual goals but are the psychological and social foundations of the Indian social



structure. Prabhu suggests that Dharma acts as the regulatory mechanism that ensures Artha and Kama do not lead to social anarchy.

3.2. The Sociology of Values and Modernity

Sociologists such as M.N. Srinivas have explored how traditional values interact with modernization. Recent secondary literature (e.g., Das, 2012) suggests that the "Crisis of Values" in modern India is a result of the over-emphasis on *Artha* at the expense of *Dharma*. This section of the literature highlights that without a moral anchor (Dharma), economic growth fails to produce social well-being (Sukha), leading to an unsustainable society.

3.3. Educational Transformation and NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (2020) document itself serves as a primary source for secondary analysis. Scholars analyzing the policy (e.g., V.S. Chauhan, 2021) note that the shift toward "Holistic Education" is a deliberate attempt to move away from the colonial model of education which focused solely on creating "clerks" (Artha-centric). The literature highlights that NEP 2020's focus on "Value-based Education" is an implicit revival of the Purushartha framework, aiming to develop the "Complete Human" (*Manav*).

4. Discussion: The Socio-Philosophical Synthesis

4.1. The Conflict of 'Artha' and 'Dharma' in a Market Economy

In modern sociology, the "Rational Choice Theory" suggests that individuals act to maximize personal gain (*Artha*). However, without the regulatory framework of *Dharma*, this leads to what Emile Durkheim called 'Anomie'—a state of social normlessness.

The discussion argues that the current global social crisis (inequality, corruption) is not a result of seeking wealth (*Artha*), but of seeking it *independent* of *Dharma*. NEP 2020's insistence on ethics in vocational training attempts to "re-shackle" economic activity to moral responsibility. This ensures that a student trained in AI or Commerce uses their skills for *Lokasangraha* (universal well-being) rather than mere exploitation.

4.2. 'Kama' and the Crisis of Mental Health: A Sociological View

Modern society is often defined by hyper-consumerism, which targets *Kama* (desires). However, the IKS framework suggests that *Kama* must be balanced by the other three goals to prevent psychological burnout.

The Problem: When education only focuses on competition, it creates a "performance society" leading to high levels of anxiety.

The IKS Solution: By integrating *Kama* with *Moksha* (inner peace/detachment), education helps students manage their desires. NEP 2020's focus on the arts, humanities, and "mindful learning" is a practical application of balancing *Kama*. It shifts the objective from "consumption" to "contentment."

4.3. 'Moksha' as Social Liberation (Self-Actualization)

While *Moksha* is often seen as a religious or transcendental goal, sociologically it represents the ultimate development of the self.

In the context of NEP 2020, *Moksha* can be interpreted as "Autonomy of Thought." It is the stage where a student is no longer a slave to social prejudices or mechanical learning.

The policy's emphasis on "Critical Thinking" and "Multidisciplinary Education" allows a student to see the "unity in diversity," a core IKS concept. This reduces social friction (casteism, communalism) because a "liberated" mind (*Mukta Chitta*) views society as a unified whole.



4.4. Synthesis: The Role of NEP 2020 in "Re-Socialization"

The discussion concludes that NEP 2020 is not just a policy change; it is a process of Re-Socialization. By reintroducing the Purushartha framework, the Indian education system is moving away from the colonial "factory model" of producing employees. Instead, it is moving toward a "Gurukul-Modernity Hybrid" where:

Sr.N.	Purushartha	Sociological Equivalent	NEP 2020 Integration
1	Dharma	Ethics & Social Norms	Value-based Education/ Constitutional Values
2	Artha	Economic Agency / Capital	Skill Development/ Vocational Training
3	Kama	Emotional & Social Well-being	Arts, Humanities & Mental Health support
4	Moksha	Self-Actualization	Holistic/Multidisciplinary Learning

1. Dharma: Establishing the Ethical Foundation

In the sociological lexicon, Dharma translates to 'Ethics and Social Norms'—the glue that holds a civilization together. The colonial model often reduced education to a value-neutral pursuit of information. NEP 2020 seeks to correct this by integrating Value-based Education and Constitutional Values (like *Seva*, *Ahimsa*, and *Nyaya*) into the core curriculum. By grounding students in Dharma, the policy ensures that future citizens possess the moral compass necessary to navigate the complexities of a globalized world.

2. Artha: Reimagining Economic Agency

Artha (Material Prosperity) is often misunderstood as greed, but sociologically, it represents 'Economic Agency' and 'Resource Management.' While the previous system focused on creating "subservient employees," NEP 2020 focuses on Skill Development and Vocational Training. This empowers students with the "Capital" required to contribute to the economy independently, fostering entrepreneurship and self-reliance (*Atmanirbharta*) rather than mere job-seeking.

3. Kama: Prioritizing Emotional & Social Well-being

In a "Performance Society," Kama (desires/emotional fulfillment) is often exploited by consumerism, leading to mental health crises. NEP 2020 addresses this by reintegrating Arts and Humanities into the mainstream. By providing Mental Health Support and promoting aesthetic appreciation, the policy recognizes that a student's emotional well-being is as critical as their academic score. This shifts the educational focus from "competition" to "contentment."

4. Moksha: Achieving Self-Actualization

In this sociological framework, Moksha is redefined as 'Self-Actualization' or 'Intellectual Autonomy.' It is the ultimate goal where a student is liberated from mechanical learning and social prejudices. The NEP's Multidisciplinary Framework allows for the "Unity of Knowledge," encouraging students to see the interconnectedness of all subjects. This "liberation of the mind" (*Sa Vidya Ya Vimuktaye*) enables critical thinking and a higher sense of purpose.

5. CONCLUSION

The integration of Purushartha into the sociology curriculum, as envisioned by NEP 2020, represents a shift from a "Eurocentric" to an "Indocentric" understanding of society. This research concludes that the four-fold objectives of life provide a comprehensive psychological and social framework that can mitigate the negative effects of hyper-materialism. By balancing Artha (wealth) with Dharma (ethics) and Kama (emotional fulfillment) with Moksha (self-realization), the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a model for a sustainable, ethical, and mentally healthy society. The National Education Policy 2020 acts as a vital catalyst in this transition, moving Indian academia toward a multidisciplinary approach where ancient wisdom is not just studied as history, but applied as a living science to solve modern social problems. By integrating the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) into the mainstream curriculum, the policy facilitates a "Re-socialization" process that encourages students to pursue economic success (*Artha*) without compromising moral integrity (*Dharma*).

In conclusion, reimagining balanced social living requires a synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern technology. The Purushartha framework, supported by the structural reforms of NEP 2020, offers a path toward a society that is not only economically prosperous but also ethically grounded and spiritually fulfilled. This is the essence of becoming a Vishwa Guru—providing the world with a model for living that is both modern and deeply rooted in timeless values.



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