

## Chapter #: 8

### Chapter Title: “The Three (Or is It Four) Aims of Life in the Hindu Imaginary”

#### General Comments on the Chapter:

Doniger does well to devote a chapter to this central Hindu doctrine of Purusharthas which is crucial to understand the basic structure of Hindu ethics, philosophy and theology. She sets this chapter apart from the rest of the book by saying – “*It is an interlude, its subject neither any particular historical period nor any of the main actors in this book (women, low castes, dogs, horses), but certain basic ideas that undergrid the practice of Hinduism as well as its historical development.*” (page 199). As a result, the chapter is relatively free of Doniger’s favorite topics - sleaze, sex, booze, rape, drugs and violence.

Unfortunately, she gets distracted far too often in petty discussions about whether 3 or 4 is the cardinal number in Hindu traditions and so on. As a result of these distractions, she leaves out topics that should be discussed in this chapter – the glorification of the human form (vis-à-vis animals such as dogs and horses!) in Hindu scriptures and their exhortations that we should not let this human birth go waste. Or the three-fold classification of sorrows. Or even what Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha are really all about. Wendy largely talks *around* these concepts instead of talking *about* them. The chapter might make titillating reading for a casual reader, but it will not enlighten him much about what these concepts really mean.

And then of course, the chapter abounds in errors and wrong interpretations resulting from cherry picking of data to fit pre-conceived theories. Doniger also creates unnecessary controversy (an attention grabbing mechanism?) where none exists. We discuss some of them below.

Comment #	Page #	Paragraph # on the page	Statement from the book	Comments
1	200	3	“The expedient of simply adding both the ether and hell to the basic pair of sky and earth is not taken, perhaps because the idea of three worlds was already so firmly embedded in Hindu cosmology. The number of worlds remained stable forever – that is, they were never squared, as were	Incorrect statement. Beyond the three worlds, Hindu scriptures frequently speak of 7 realms (sapta-lokas), 14 realms (chaturdasha-bhuvan) etc. See for example Vyasa’s commentary on <b>Yogasutra 3.26</b>

			other paradigmatic triads....Indeed their resistance to quadripartition is one of the props of the argument that triads, rather than quarters, are the basis of Hindu thinking.”	
2	201	3	“Originally they were a triad, dharma, artha, and kama, known collectively as the Trio (trivarga).”	<p>Doniger’s claim that Moksha was added later to Trivarga is based on a paper by Troy Organ,<sup>1</sup> who does not give any proof for his claim either.</p> <p>The fact is that the oldest classical formulations of the doctrine of Purushartha already include Moksha as the fourth.</p> <p>Recent works clearly state that this fourth Purushartha is already presumed in the Vedic literature along with the first three.<sup>2</sup></p>
3	204	3	“The Artha-shastra and Kama-sutra rank dharma first and karma last, but Manu, oddly enough, hedges: “Dharma and artha are said to be better, or kama and artha, or dharma alone, or artha alone, here on earth. But the fixed rule is that the Trio is the best (2.224)””	<p>Baseless speculation. The quoted verse of Manu forms a part of the section addressed to graduating students while they are transitioning from the stage of Brahmacharya to the stage of householder. The purpose of this passage is to instruct these students that they should live a balanced life and should pursue all the 3 goals in the triad of Trivarga because all the three are important.</p> <p>The intent is not to put these three goals in a hierarchical</p>

<sup>1</sup> Troy Organ, ‘Three into Four in Hinduism’, *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol 1 (1973), pp. 7-13

<sup>2</sup> Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti, 2000, ‘The Value System as Reflected in the Vedas – The Concept of Purusharthas,’ Maharsih Sandipani Rashtriya Ved Vidya Pratishthan (Ujjain)

				<p>relationship, but to suggest that all (and not just 1 or just 2 of these 3) ought to be pursued. Elsewhere otherwise, Manu clearly states or implies that Dharma is superior to Artha and Kama. For instance: “<i>Dharma is proclaimed for them who are not attached to Artha and Kama</i>” (<b>Manu 2.13a</b>); “<i>They who transgress Dharma and whose wealth is obtained through falsehood...they will never get happiness</i>” (<b>Manu 4.170</b>) etc.</p> <p>In the entire text, the primacy of Dharma over Artha and Kama is clearly assumed, which is why Manu clearly states the limits of Dharma within which Artha and Kama ought to be pursued in literally 100s of verses in the text.</p>
4	205-206	5,1	<p>“The texts on each of the aims of life do not, by and large, deal with moksha when they deal with the other three aims, either because they did not take it seriously or, more because they felt it operated beyond the range of their concerns.”</p>	<p>A false generalization. The Arthashastra hardly deals with Kama and Dharma. The Kama-sutra hardly deals with Dharma and Artha. But Dharma-shastras devote considerable sections to Moksha. For instance, the last of the 12 chapters of Manusmriti is on Moksha. The Adhyatma Patala of Apastamba Dharmasutra and dozens of verses of the Yajnavalkya Smriti deal with Moksha.</p> <p>The texts proper for studying about Moksha are the Moksha-Shastras (i.e., Darshanas) and this is where we must search for the fourth Purushartha. Therefore, Doniger’s statement is like complaining that there are no penguins in the Sahara and no camels in Antarctica.</p>
5	206	2	<p>“Some authors also attempted various unsatisfactory, overlapping correlations between the four aims and other quartets/triads...It works better with the colors and qualities; white lucidity for Brahmins, red energy for Kshatriyas, and black torpor for the lower classes. But the</p>	<p>Doniger’s attempt to project ‘doomed failures’ where none exist is due to her selective use of data in Hindu scriptures. Hindu texts actually assign distinct 4 colors to the four social classes –</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Sage Bhrigu said:</i> (Prajāpati Brahmā) made white as the color of Brahmanas, red as the</p>

			matchmaking is generally a doomed failure attempt to put a square peg in a round hole.”	color of Kshatriyas, yellow as the color of the Vaishyas and black as the color of the Shūdras. <b>Mahabharata 12.181.5</b>
6	206	3	“Similarly. Where the Hindus had formulated a group of three passions – lust (kama), anger (krodha), and greed (lobha, or in some formulations, fear....- now a fourth metaphysical, epistemological emotion was added: delusion (moha).”	Again, a distortion by Doniger, a failed attempt to put a hexagonal peg into a round or a square hole. The Dharmashastras rather talk about ‘shadripu’ (six enemies) viz., lust, anger, greed, delusion, jealousy and ego.
7	206-207	3,1	“...to the Vedic modes of experience (waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep) was added a fourth stage, just called the fourth (turiya).....”	Again, an unsuccessful attempt to postdate inclusion of Moksha based on a half-baked understanding of Troy Organ’s paper (who quotes the Mandukya Upanishad). The fact of the matter is that all the four states are mentioned already in earlier Upanishads such as the Brihadaranyaka. It is unclear what is specifically Vedic about the first three modes of experience and what is non-Vedic about the fourth.
8	208	1-2	Doniger first quotes Kama-sutra 1.2.6, “...Or, because the life span is uncertain, a man pursues these aims as the opportunity arises, but he should remain celibate until he has acquired knowledge...”  The author then comments – “....The suggestion that you can indulge in kama at any stage of life (except childhood) reflects (or perhaps even satirizes?) widespread arguments whether you can engage in renunciation (samnyasa) at any stage.”	Doniger’s speculation reminds one of scoops and scandals discussed in gossip tabloids.  Adoption of renunciation is a formal occasion, a Samskara that is bound by more formal rules on eligibility. On the other hand, indulgence in kama is a private aspect of one’s life with the restriction that a student must not indulge in kama (whereas a young or an older person can).  To associate kama with samnyasa in the Freudian free association manner based on superficial similarities is not very intelligent.
9	209-	5,1	“....though different texts had different	Again, Doniger creates unnecessary controversy without

210		<p>ideas about what those precepts [general Dharma] were. Even a single text, Manu's dharma text, lists them, differently in different places. In one verse, "Nonviolence, truth, not stealing, purification, and the suppression of sensory organs are the dharma of the four classes, in a nutshell (10.63)." Non violence also comes first in another, related verse in Manu: "Non violence, the suppression of sensory powers, the recitation of the Veda, inner heat, knowledge, and serving the guru bring about the supreme good (12.83-93; 10.63)." But Manu includes only one of these (suppression of the sensory powers, not nonviolence) in the ten commandments for the top three classes in all four stages of life: "Truth, not stealing, purification, suppression of the sensory powers, wisdom, learning, patience, forgiveness, self-control, and lack of anger (6.91-4)." Significantly, he does not include generosity, the primary Vedic virtue, in any of these lists. The general thought behind all the lists is a vague social ethic."</p>	<p>understanding the fact that these verses belong to different contexts within the text.</p> <p>Verses 12.83-93 deal with means of Moksha, and therefore this list will be different from the other lists.</p> <p>Verses 6.91-4 come after a discussion on the Samnyasa (4<sup>th</sup> Ashrama) and deal with the general duties for all the <i>four Ashramas</i> (the qualification 'dvija' is stated because Shudras do not necessarily go through the stage of studentship). Verse 10.63 on the other hand deals comes when the duties of all the four Varnas have been explained in their entirety and therefore it deals with the general duties of all the <i>four Varnas</i>.</p> <p>The Varnas and Ashramas form an intermeshing matrix but are not entirely overlapping categories. Therefore, general duties, when prescribed for all the four Ashramas, are different for general duties prescribed for all the four Varnas (social classes).</p> <p>It may be noted though that within the first and the second half of verse 10.63, some manuscripts notice an additional verse – "Performance of shraadhha ceremonies, serving atithis, charity, straight-forwardness, progeny through one's wife and absence of jealousy [are also the dharma of the four classes]."</p> <p>If this extra verse is genuine and got dropped later, Wendy's speculations lose much of their force.</p> <p>But even otherwise, these verses should be read in conjunction with the specific duties of different Varnas and Ashramas to understand why certain virtues are omitted.</p> <p>Therefore, generosity cannot be a duty for the fourth stage</p>
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				<p>(Samnyasa ashrama), because the ascetic himself does not possess anything. Manu has already enumerated charity/generosity as a duty for the first three classes (Manu 1-88-91) but not for the Shudra. For these reasons, generosity is not listed in 6.91-94 and 10.63</p> <p>As for the vagueness of the social ethic alleged by Doniger, the truth is that it is inherently impossible to enumerate ALL the precepts that one should follow.</p>
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**Conclusion:** -

Wendy Doniger wastes too much ink on drawing silly parallels and using data selectively to prove useless theories that do not illuminate the doctrine of Purushartha which is the subject of this chapter. Here generalizations seem to be dependent more on sensational claims and cute phrases rather than on facts – a problem that plagues her entire book.

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Rev 1: 07 February 2010