

GCE A LEVEL

Eduqas A-LEVEL
RELIGIOUS STUDIES



**Theme 3C:
Hindu Liberationist Thinking as Defending
the Poor and Oppressed**

Contents

Glossary Key Terms	3
The Importance of the Four Purushartas - The Four Aims in Life - dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (pleasure, and moksha (liberation) - to the Hindu attitudes to wealth and poverty and the relationship between them	4
Their influence (the purusharthas) on the guidance of the Artha Shastra	8
The Influence of Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982) adapted from an article at http://www.culturalindia.net/reformers	10
Issues for discussion	13
Other Useful Resources	14

Glossary Key Terms

Arthashastras - an important and necessary objective of government which includes social, legal, economic and worldly affairs

Purusharthas - The four aims of human life - dharma, artha, kama, moksha.

Bhave, Vinoba - Indian advocate of non-violence and human rights. Best known for the Bhoodan Movement.

Other useful terms

Artha - meaning, sense, purpose or goal

Purusha - Can mean either God or a self (referring to human being) - depending on the context in which it is used.

Shastra - a sacred scripture

The Importance of the Four Purushartas - The Four Aims in Life - dharma (righteousness), artha (wealth), kama (pleasure, and moksha (liberation) - to the Hindu attitudes to wealth and poverty and the relationship between them

Hindus have four aims or goals in life which are linked to their ashramas:

Kama - physical and sensual pleasure, including sexual pleasure and pleasure we gain from life in the grihastha or householder stage. In this respect a sexual relationship should only take place within marriage. Hindus are expected to experience pleasure as preparation for the soul's devotion to God.

Artha - to gain wealth through honest means. In the grihastha stage the requirement is to work to gain wealth to provide for the family. However, this should be done without a greed for wealth which would result in poor karma. The scriptures make it clear that hoarding wealth is wrong (see Rig Veda 10:117) In the past the aim of artha was a particularly important duty or dharma for the raja or king who was expected to gain wealth and prosperity for his people.

Dharma - moral and spiritual duty towards your family and society. If there is any clash between artha and dharma it is dharma that should always take priority. The importance of dharma is clearly explained in the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna's initial refusal to fight is roundly condemned by Krishna. However, dharma not only applies to your varna or ashrama - each person has their own dharma (svadharma) and women have their stridharma. As your varna is linked to your previous karma, fulfilling your dharma in this life is vital if you are to improve your status in your next life.

Moksha - liberation of the soul from rebirth (samsara) and the ultimate aim for all Hindus. When the atman achieves moksha it will no longer be subject to rebirth and becomes one with Brahman. Whilst this is a goal for all Hindus, most do not focus on achieving it unless they have taken sannyasin. For most Hindus, it is concentrating on their dharma that is their main focus.

So, for a Hindu the purpose or aim of life is to follow the law of God (dharma) and achieve salvation (moksha) by leading a balanced life that should include both material comforts (artha) and pleasure (kama). These four aims are believed to be essential in maintaining balance and order in the world.

The Relevance of the Purusharthas in relation to Wealth and Poverty in the 21st century

Of the four Purusharthas it appears that artha is the most relevant in this topic, although it must be remembered that gaining wealth is in conjunction with your dharma. Wealth is regarded as a good thing by Hindus provided it has been gained honestly. The Purusharthas teach householders that it is their duty to make money to provide for their families, but they should only work in jobs where they can follow their dharma according to their ashrama (stage of life) without hurting people or animals. Hindus should work fairly and honestly and should treat their employees fairly and never try to cheat customers.

Key Texts - Manu 4:12 and 4:15

“He who desires happiness must strive after a perfectly contented disposition and control himself; for happiness has contentment for its root, the root of unhappiness is the contrary (disposition).” **Laws of Manu (Manusmriti) 4:12**

“Whether he be rich or even in distress, let him not seek wealth through pursuits to which men cleave, nor by forbidden occupations, nor (let him accept presents) from any (giver whosoever he may be).” **Laws of Manu (Manusmriti) 4:15**

In relation to poverty, when looking at the life of a sannyasin, Hinduism advocates austerity and simplicity. Indeed, there have been many reformers within Hinduism who have lived such a life, such as Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. However, it does not promote poverty as a way of life for all Hindus.

Hindu scriptures state on several occasions that a man should keep what he requires for himself and not hoard food.

Key Quote

“One may amass wealth with hundreds of hands but one should also distribute it with thousands of hands. If someone keeps all that he accumulates for himself and does not give it to others the hoarded wealth will eventually prove to be the cause of ruin”

(Arthava Veda 3.24-25)

Rig Veda Hymn 10;117 “In Praise of Generosity” emphasises the important of donation to the poor by those who have wealth. It states that we know we will all die, whether we are rich or poor, although death from hunger is not what the gods want for us. So, we should never refuse a request from someone living in poverty and we should befriend the person making the request for help. In short, give to anyone who has a need that is greater than your own because if you hoard your wealth and ignore the poor you are punishing both your present life and the one you will have in the future

Key Text

Rig Veda Book 10 HYMN 117 In Praise of Generosity

(from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10117.htm>)`

1 The Gods have not ordained hunger to be our death: even to the well-fed man comes death in varied shape.

The riches of the liberal never waste away, while he who will not give finds none to comfort him.

2 The man with food in store who, when the needy comes in miserable case begging for bread to eat,

Hardens his heart against him-even when of old he did him service-finds not one to comfort him.

3 Bounteous is he who gives unto the beggar who comes to him in want of food and feeble.

Success attends him in the shout of battle. He makes a friend of him in future troubles.

4 No friend is he who to his friend and comrade who comes imploring food, will offer nothing.

Let him depart-no home is that to rest in-, and rather seek a stranger to support him.

5 Let the rich satisfy the poor implorer, and bend his eye upon a longer pathway.

Riches come now to one, now to another, and like the wheels of carts are ever rolling.

6 The foolish man wins food with fruitless labour: that food -I speak the truth- shall be his ruin.

He feeds no trusty friend, no man to love him. All guilt is he who eats with no partaker.

7 The ploughshare ploughing makes the food that feeds us, and with its feet cuts through the path it follows.

Better the speaking than the silent Brahman: the liberal friend outvalues him who gives not.

Poverty in India Today

India has a great deal of poverty, particularly amongst the millions of Sudras and Dalits. Much of this is due to the rules on pollution in Hinduism where anyone considered to be outside the varna system (i.e. the Dalits) are forced to live in extreme poverty with its associated illiteracy and cruelty. According to a 2016 World Bank report India has the largest number of people living below the international poverty line; 30% of the population, that's approximately 224 million people!

There is a very strong tradition of dana (charity) and seva (service) in Hinduism. Dana and seva are regarded as important within an individual's dharma and can help to gain increased karmic merit (ppunya). This can be seen in the practice of feeding strangers during religious festivals, offering charity to sadhus and in projects such as the Hare Krishna Food for Life charity and the work of the Ramakrishna Mission (Link to Themes 2A and 1C)

Their influence (the purusharthas) on the guidance of the Artha Shastra

The Artha Shastra meaning “science of wealth”, is a collection of texts, written by several authors that discuss how to acquire wealth and power. The most popular one dates back possibly to 300 BCE, traditionally written by **Chanakya (aka Kautilya or Vishnugupta)**. The Artha Shastra had some influence on other Hindu scriptures including the Laws of Manu (Manusmriti). Chanakya assigns a high place to artha in his writings, placing it higher than the aims of kama and dharma.

Whilst the Artha Shastra is usually translated as sometimes ‘the science of wealth’ or ‘the science of politics’, but it includes a variety of teachings relating (amongst other things) to the pursuit of wealth such as through trade and commerce, keeping accounts, the expense of war, gambling and money. The texts were written to give advice to kings and governments, so that they could fulfil their dharma properly. They include all kinds of instructions on how to rule successfully and with the benefit of their subjects in mind, including how to act in times of famine, or other natural disasters such as by creating irrigation waterways and exemption of taxes on those affected. As such they have advice for all varnas in society, although they were written specifically for the rulers or kshatriyas at the time.

Chanakya begins his writing by saying that, *“In the happiness of his population, rests the ruler’s own happiness, in their welfare lies his welfare, he shall not necessarily consider as good whatever pleases him but he shall consider as good whatever pleases his population”*. (<http://indiafacts.org/the-arthashastra-and-the-welfare-state/>)

The Artha Shastra defined welfare as, *“the increase in economic activity, the protection of livelihood, safeguarding vulnerable segments of society, consumer protection, the prevention of the harassment of citizens, and the welfare of labour and of prisoners.”* (<http://indiafacts.org/the-arthashastra-and-the-welfare-state/>)

In his writings Chanakya also advocates land reform, where land is taken from landowners and farmers who own land, but do not grow anything for a long time and given to poorer farmers who want to grow crops, but do not own any land. (Link to later notes on Vinobe Bhave)

He also declares the need for empowering the weak and poor in one’s kingdom: *‘Wealth and well-being of the subjects can be most advanced by a fair and efficient system of taxation, one which will supply the King with tax revenue but will not stifle economic growth’*

The Relevance of the Artha Shastra in the 21st Century

Despite being written over 2,000 years ago the Artha Shastras still have relevance for Hindus and governments today, in particular the view that good government is ethical when it links its policies to the welfare of its people. It is not surprising then that these ideas remain popular in India.

The Artha Shastras provided a political philosophy for the rulers of the Mauryan Empire (322 - 187 BCE). The kings learned from them that their role was to exercise power and accrue wealth, while all the time managing the affairs so that they were of benefit to his people. This clearly still has relevance for the Indian government today. The emphasis in the Artha Shastra on bringing together a diverse population with the aim of social cohesion has much that can be successfully used to help towards dealing with the issues of wealth and poverty in present day India. For example, the Artha Shastra clearly state that women should not be exploited in the workforce, demands harsh punishment for rape, and states that sex workers should be protected from physical injury and exploitation. Women were also given the right to inherit and transfer property. (Link to Theme 3C on Equality between men and women)

Advice on social welfare is relevant with Chanakya's statements that the State should help the poor and be proactive in contributing to the welfare of its people.

The Influence of Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982) adapted from an article at <http://www.culturalindia.net/reformers>

Vinoba Bhave was a non-violence activist, freedom activist, social reformer and spiritual teacher. He dedicated his life to serve the poor and standing up for their rights. He led an ascetic style of existence for most of his adult life but is best known for his '**Bhoodan Movement**' (Gift of the Land) in which he encouraged landowners to donate unwanted or unused land to the poor. Vinoba once said, *"All revolutions are spiritual at the source. All my activities have the sole purpose of achieving a union of hearts."*

Early Life

He was born in September 1895, the eldest son of Narahari Shambhu Rao and Rukmini Devi. His mother Rukmini Devi was very religious and instilled in Vinoba a deep sense of spiritualism and a spiritual conscience.

Although Vinoba was a good student, traditional education never really appealed to him. He considered renouncing social life or joining the Indian independence struggle and travelled the length of India in his search for spirituality. Whilst in the holy city of Benares he read in a newspaper about Gandhi and a speech he had given at the Banaras Hindu University. This was to change his life considerably. He burned his entire school and college certificates and started corresponding with Gandhi, who invited Vinoba to his ashram in Ahmedabad. Vinoba settled into the ashram, taking on the varied activities expected of all those who stayed there - studying, teaching, spinning cotton and leading an austere life.

Social Work

Gandhi greatly admired Vinoba and after Gandhi's assassination in 1948, many of his followers looked to Vinoba for direction. Vinoba recommended that as India had reached its goal of Swaraj (self-rule) their new goal should be to establish a society dedicated to Sarvodaya, or the "welfare of all." Influenced by the example set by Gandhi, Vinoba took up the cause of people that Gandhi had referred to as Harijans (children of God). Vinoba was keen to improve Indian village life and establish the kind of society that Gandhi had envisioned in an Independent India. The Sarvodaya movement under Vinoba implemented various programs during the 1950s, the chief among which was the Bhoodan Movement.

Key Quote

"It is a curious phenomena that God has made the hearts of the poor, rich and those of the rich, poor." Vinoba Bhave

The Bhoodan Movement

It was in 1951, that Vinoba Bhave started his peace-trek on foot through the region of Telangana, an area that had been devastated by violence. On April 18, 1951, 40 landless Harijan families of the Pochampalli village told him they desperately needed land to make a living. They were asking for 80 acres of land so Vinoba simply asked the landlords of the village to save the Harijans. To everybody's surprise, one landlord (Ram Chandra Reddy) offered the required land. This incident was the beginning of the Bhoodan (Gift of the Land) Movement which was to continue for the next thirteen years as Vinoba toured the length and breadth of the country, hoping that his work would eliminate the greatest single cause of India's poverty: land monopoly. Gifts of land averaged 200 acres of land per day in the early years of the movement, and in 1952 in Uttar Pradesh, a whole village was gifted. This community type of gift was called Gramdan (Gift of the Village). He collected around 4.4 million acres of land, of which around 1.3 million was distributed among poor landless farmers. The movement attracted admiration from all over the world and was commended for being the only experiment of his kind to incite voluntary social justice.

Why was so much land donated? It is thought that not all the motives of the rich landowners were economic. Many of them may have hoped to gain spiritual merit or positive karma through their gifts. Perhaps however, some of the rich were really affected by Vinoba's message.

Death

In November 1982, Vinoba Bhave fell seriously ill and decided to end his life. He refused to accept any food and medicine during his last days. On 15 November 1982, the great social reformer passed away.

Key Quotes on Vinoba Bhave

"His life represents harmonious blend of learning, spiritual perception and compassion for the lowly and the lost." (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan - Second President of India)

"Vinoba's movement rekindled faith in non-violence and human values advocated by Gandhi. ... It raised important questions regarding inequality prevalent in the society. Vinoba saw the land as the gift of God like air, water, sky and sunshine. He connected science with spirituality and the autonomous village with the world movement ... Many of his ideas remain relevant and inspiring in the strife-ridden modern times." (Dr. Usha Thakkar <https://www.mkgandhi.org/vinoba/bio.htm>)

"Gramdan is the most creative thought coming from the East in recent times." (Louis Fischer, American journalist)

Was the Bhoodan Movement Successful?

An on-line article in the Indian Telegraph newspaper in 2012 (https://www.telegraphindia.com/1120919/jsp/nation/story_15993611.jsp) reported that half of the land *“originally donated by rich landowners during Vinoba Bhave’s 1950s Bhoodan movement remain undistributed among the landless poor half a century on”*. A survey by the Bhoodan Gramdan Samiti showed that of the 4,763,566 acres that had been donated by landowners, only 2,444,112 acres had been distributed. It appears that because land that had been donated had not been distributed by the local governments, the descendants of the original donors had simply reoccupied the land. P.V. Rajagopal, president of the Ekata Parishad, an organisation working on land issues, said, *“Many Sarvodaya workers failed to pursue the Bhoodan movement with the commitment needed. Many were more interested in the charismatic leadership of Vinoba and less in the task at hand (monitoring the distribution by the Bhoodan boards).”*

Whilst much of the donated land has not been taken up it did have some positive outcomes. Landless labourers had the opportunity to cultivate land to support themselves. Even land previously regarded as being uncultivable was cultivated. It also helped reduce incidences of exploitation of the poor.

The Bhoodan Movement still exists across India today. It remains focused on helping the poor and tackling issues of social welfare and donating land to those who need it. It has influenced many Hindus to volunteer to help tackle this key social issue and has made an impact on some small communities who have felt the impact from this movement.

However, its influence has been minimal as it was far easier to receive a declaration of Bhoodan or Gramdan than to establish it in practice. Only a few thousand villages have transferred land to village councils and in most of the villages, progress has been slow.

Issues for discussion

Are the Purusharthas still relevant in the modern world?

Are Hindu teachings on wealth and poverty practical in the 21st century?

Do the teachings on wealth and poverty in religious texts such as The Vedas and Manu have any relevance today?

How have the Artha Shastras influenced attitudes towards wealth in India in the 20th and 21st centuries?

Was Vinoba Bhave successful in changing people's attitudes towards social welfare?

Useful Resources

<https://resources.edugas.co.uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?rlid=1246>

Edugas Component 1E: Scheme of Work

Websites

https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_aims.asp

More detailed information on the four aims.

<http://indiafacts.org/the-arthashastra-and-the-welfare-state/>

Very useful for an overview of the contents of the Artha Shastra.

<http://www.indiathenation.com/chanakya-story-of-indias-greatest-politician/>

An article on Indiathenation.com about “Chanakya: Story of India’s greatest politician”

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10117.htm>

Rig Veda 10:117 from the Internet Sacred Text archive.

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu04.htm>

A copy of the Laws of Manu

<https://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/society/poverty-in-india-and-its-causes - article>

From Mapsofindia.com on the causes of poverty in India.

www.markshep.com/peace/GT_Vinoba.html

More detailed information on Vinoba Bhave and his Bhoodan Movement

<https://www.alliancemagazine.org/feature/traditions-of-giving-in-hinduism/>

A useful article on traditions of giving (dana and seva) in Hinduism.

<https://bit.ly/2ld8Rga>

A very useful research paper on poverty and development in Hinduism. Also useful for Theme 3F on gender issues.