

Enriching the Discourse on Sustainable Development

Through the Lenses of Puruṣārtha Catuṣṭaya

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CENTRAL PROPOSITION

Inner development.
Shared flourishing.

Four human pursuits offer a spiritual lens on sustainable development and its purposes.



Read the research

01 Background and question

Sustainable development involves both external conditions and the inner capacities that guide action. The chapter explores how Indian philosophical accounts of human pursuits can enrich this relationship.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can the four human pursuits deepen the discourse on sustainable and inner development?

02 Conceptual framework

Puruṣārtha

The ends and means of human striving.

Catuṣṭaya

Four pursuits understood together.

Dharma guides artha and kāma; their balanced pursuit is oriented towards mokṣa. Material welfare and spiritual development are considered within one account of life.

03 Evidence and method

Conceptual chapter using etymological analysis and interpretation of selected Sanskrit sources.

The authors relate the four pursuits to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Inner Development Goals (IDGs). These are philosophical connections, rather than measured effects on development outcomes.

04 Four pursuits, one horizon

An interpretive summary of the chapter’s framework. The source contains no original research figure.

01 Dharma · sustaining responsibility

The ethical and sustaining basis for personal conduct, social life and care for the wider world.

02 Artha · resources and welfare

The material and intellectual means that support life, including prosperity and knowledge.

03 Kāma · desire and aspiration

Human wants and motivations, pursued in balance with responsibility and the needs of others.

04 Mokṣa · liberation

Freedom from suffering provides an ultimate horizon for the coordinated pursuit of the other three.

Conceptual summary based on [1].

05 Findings and contributions

A An ethical foundation

Dharma links personal responsibility with the conditions that sustain collective life.

B A broader account of welfare

Artha includes resources and knowledge; kāma brings desire and motivation into the discussion.

C Purpose beyond accumulation

Mokṣa frames freedom from suffering as an ultimate orientation for the other pursuits.

06 Discussion

The chapter connects inner transformation with outward responsibility. It proposes that higher education can cultivate spiritual understanding alongside professional knowledge, enriching how future decision-makers interpret sustainability.

07 Limitations and next steps

The SDG connections are conceptual. Educational approaches and their effects need empirical study, with attention to cultural interpretation and the diversity of spiritual traditions.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development can be enriched by considering ethical responsibility, material means, desire and liberation together.

SELECTED REFERENCES

[1] Sukhada, S., Nandram, S. S., & Bindlish, P. K. (2025). Enriching the Discourse on Sustainable Development Through the Lenses of Puruṣārtha Catuṣṭaya. In L. Zsolnai (Ed.), Spirituality and Business in the Anthropocene, 105-113. Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-91203-0_5.

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