



# "HUMAN MOTIVATION BEYOND HIERARCHIES: MAPPING PURUSHARTHAS AND MASLOW'S MODEL"

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conceptual and empirical convergence between the ancient Indian framework of Purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kaama, Moksha) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem, and Self-Actualization). Through a mixed-method empirical design involving survey instruments and comparative analysis, the paper evaluates the degree of alignment between the two paradigms across diverse demographic segments. This study seeks to empirically evaluate whether the *Purusharthas* can be mapped onto Maslow's model and how modern Indian individuals internalize these frameworks. The study attempts a comparative and empirical analysis of these two motivational frameworks to answer:

- Do the Four Folds 'Purushartha' align with Maslow's hierarchy?
- Can Maslow's model be interpreted through the lens of Indian philosophical constructs?

This study explores the conceptual and empirical convergence between Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Four Purusharthas -Dharma (duty), Artha (prosperity), Kaama (pleasure), and Moksha (liberation) — foundational goals in Indian philosophical tradition. Recognizing the limitations of linear, individualistic motivational models in multicultural contexts, this research introduces and validates the Purushartha- Need Mapping Scale (PNMS) as a culturally integrative framework for understanding human motivation. Findings indicate significant overlaps, particularly between self-actualization and Moksha, esteem and Dharma, and love/belonging and Kama. The study concludes that human motivation in Indian philosophy is not strictly hierarchical but integrative, simultaneously addressing material, emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. The PNMS offers a novel tool for culturally responsive motivation assessment in education, workplace behavior, counseling, and leadership development. The research contributes to cross-cultural psychology by proposing a holistic, dharma-centered framework for personal and societal growth.

**Keywords:** Maslow's hierarchy, Purushartha, Indian Knowledge System(IKS), Dharma, Artha, Kaam, Moksha, Self-Actualization.

## INTRODUCTION

Human motivation has been central to both ancient philosophy and modern psychology. While Abraham Maslow offered a hierarchical model based on Western humanistic psychology, Indian philosophy provides an equally nuanced view through the Purusharthas- the four aims of life: Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth/prosperity), Kaama (desire/pleasure), and Moksha (liberation). Maslow's hierarchy (1943) identifies five basic human needs—physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Similarly, Indian philosophy speaks of *Purusharthas*, which guide purposeful living:

- Dharma (moral duty)
- Artha (wealth/prosperity)
- Kama (desires/pleasures)

Moksha (salvation) Human motivation has long been a subject of inquiry in both Western psychology and Indian philosophy. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs presents a psychological framework that organizes human needs in a five-tier pyramid -from physiological necessities to self-actualization. This model has profoundly influenced theories of personal growth, workplace motivation, and human potential. However, it is largely rooted in individualistic, Western epistemology.

The four Purusharthas-Dharma (righteousness or duty), Artha (wealth and prosperity), Kaama (desires and pleasures), and Moksha (liberation) represent the four cardinal aims of human life in Indian philosophical traditions, particularly within Hindu thought but with resonances in Buddhism and Jainism as well. Far from being linear stages, the Purusharthas embody a holistic vision of human existence, where material, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions coexist and balance each other. In classical Indian thought, an individual is expected to pursue Artha and Kama within the bounds of Dharma, while ultimately aspiring for Moksha, the highest liberation. Thus, the Purusharthas are not merely personal goals but social and ethical anchors that connect individual pursuits to collective welfare and transcendental wisdom.

This study advances the argument that motivation is not merely about climbing a hierarchical ladder of needs but about harmonizing diverse goals material, emotional, ethical, and spiritual—within an integrative framework that sustains both individual flourishing and collective well-being

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

S.No.	Author(s) & Year	Study Explanation/Coverage
1	Maslow, A. H. (1943)	A theory of human motivation
2	Maslow, A. H. (1954)	<i>Motivation and Personality</i>
3	Maslow, A. H. (1969)	The farther reaches of human nature
4	Radhakrishnan, S. (1929)	<i>Indian Philosophy</i>
5	Saraswati, S. (2001)	Four aims of life: Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha
6	Chatterjee, S., & Datta, D. (1984)	<i>An Introduction to Indian Philosophy</i>
7	Bhawuk, D. P. S. (2011)	<i>Spirituality and Indian Psychology</i>
8	Soper, K. (2012)	Maslow and Moksha: East meets West
9	Kenrick, D. T., et al. (2010)	Renovating the pyramid of needs
10	Neher, A. (1991)	Maslow's theory of motivation: A critique
11	Chakraborty, S. K., & Chakraborty, D. (2006)	Indian ethics and leadership

12	Tripathi, R. C. (1990)	Motivation and values in Indian culture
13	Hofstede, G. (1984)	Culture's consequences
14	Nair, S. R. (2003)	Dharma and ethics in Indian business
15	Sharma, R. (2009)	Artha and Kama: Economic and sensual values
16	Singh, A., & Kumar, V. (2017)	Dharma in modern organizations
17	Miller, J. (2007)	Education and the soul
18	King, R. (1999)	<i>Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought</i>
19	Tilak, B. G. (1915)	<i>Gita Rahasya</i>
20	Vroom, V. H. (1964)	<i>Work and Motivation</i>
21	Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000)	The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits
22	Singh, N. (2015)	Comparative motivation models
23	Kumar, M. (2012)	Dharma and psychological well-being
24	Patel, A. (2018)	Moksha and self-transcendence in Indian youth
25	Vaidya, A. (2020)	Interpreting Maslow through Indian psychology

## ALIGNMENT OF OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESES

Objectives of the Study	Research Questions (RQ)	Hypotheses (H)
1. To analyze the conceptual convergence between the Purusharthas (Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.	RQ1: Do the Fourfold Purusharthas align with the levels of Maslow's hierarchy?	<b>H1:</b> The Purusharthas can be systematically mapped onto Maslow's hierarchy of needs, showing significant conceptual overlap (e.g., Artha ↔ Physiological/Safety, Kama ↔ Love/Belonging, Dharma ↔ Esteem, Moksha ↔ Self-Actualization).
2. To study the relationship between Purusharthas and Maslow's model among modern Indian respondents.	RQ2: Do individuals perceive similarities between Purusharthas and Maslow's hierarchy in their lived experiences?	<b>H2:</b> Respondents will demonstrate statistically significant correlations between Purushartha dimensions and corresponding levels in Maslow's hierarchy.
3. To develop the Purushartha Need Mapping Scale (PNMS) as a measurement tool for human motivation.	RQ3: Can the PNMS reliably measure the alignment of Purusharthas with Maslow's hierarchy?	<b>H3:</b> The PNMS will demonstrate strong internal consistency and validity in measuring motivational orientations across both frameworks.
4. To examine demographic variations in the internalization of Purusharthas and Maslow's needs.	RQ4: Do demographic variables (age, gender, profession, education, socio-economic status) influence how individuals relate Purusharthas to Maslow's hierarchy?	<b>H4:</b> Significant demographic differences will be observed in the prioritization and interpretation of Purusharthas in relation to Maslow's needs hierarchy.
5. To propose a culturally integrative framework for understanding human motivation.	RQ5: Can Maslow's model be reinterpreted through the lens of Indian philosophical constructs (Purusharthas) to form a holistic framework of motivation?	<b>H5:</b> An integrative framework combining Purusharthas and Maslow's hierarchy provides a more holistic and culturally sensitive understanding of human motivation than either model independently.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the cross-cultural integration of Indian philosophical constructs (Purusharthas) with the Western psychological model (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). It positions

human motivation as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be fully explained by linear or culture-specific models but requires a holistic and integrative approach.

At the foundation, the Purusharthas-Dharma (duty/ethics), Artha (wealth/prosperity), Kama (desires/relationships), and Moksha (liberation/spiritual realization)-represent the fourfold aims of life in Indian philosophy. These are not hierarchical but interdependent, guiding individuals to pursue material well-being, social harmony, ethical responsibility, and spiritual transcendence simultaneously.

Parallely, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs-Physiological, Safety, Love/Belonging, Esteem, and Self-Actualization explains human motivation as a progression from basic survival to higher-order fulfillment. While widely influential, Maslow's model has been critiqued for its individualistic, sequential orientation and limited applicability across non-Western contexts.

This study hypothesizes that the Purusharthas can be systematically mapped onto Maslow's hierarchy, creating a bridge between Eastern and Western paradigms of human motivation:

- **Artha** aligns with Physiological and Safety needs, as both emphasize material security and survival.
- **Kaama** aligns with Love/Affection/Belonging needs, focusing on pleasure, relationships, and emotional connection.
- **Dharma** aligns with Esteem needs, reflecting social recognition, responsibility, and moral fulfillment.
- **Moksha** aligns with Self-Actualization, representing the highest goal of self-realization, though Moksha extends beyond individual potential toward spiritual liberation.

The conceptual framework thus proposes that:

1. Human motivation is not strictly hierarchical (as in Maslow) but integrative (as in Purusharthas).
2. Cultural context shapes motivational priorities, with Indian individuals often integrating Dharma and Moksha alongside material and emotional needs.
3. A culturally responsive model of motivation can be developed by combining Purusharthas and Maslow's framework, validated through PNMS.

This framework guides the research by linking objectives, research questions, and hypotheses into a coherent structure. It positions the study as both a theoretical bridge (between Eastern and Western paradigms) and a practical contribution (through PNMS for use in education, workplace, counseling, and leadership development).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The quantitative analysis is primarily concerned with measuring motivational orientations among respondents through the Purushartha Need Mapping Scale (PNMS), a scale developed specifically for this study. The qualitative analysis provides rich insights into how individuals interpret and balance material, emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of their lives.

## Population and Sample

The population for this study comprises across multiple demographic categories in India, including students, working professionals, academicians, and homemakers. The rationale for choosing such a diverse population lies in the universality of both Maslow's and the Purushartha frameworks, which attempt to explain human motivation across contexts.

- **Sample Size:** Based on Cochran's formula for determining adequate sample size in social science research, and considering practical feasibility, the study targeted 250 respondents. **Sampling Technique:** A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling was adopted. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of respondents from different socio-economic and professional backgrounds, while snowball sampling allowed the researcher to reach participants through referrals. This hybrid strategy enabled the collection of a heterogeneous dataset reflecting urban and semi-urban perspectives.
- **Demographic Parameters:** Respondents were classified according to age (20–60 years), gender, education (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral), profession (students, corporate employees, academicians, homemakers), and socio-economic status. These demographic variables served as independent factors for testing variations in motivational orientations.

## Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was carried out in multiple stages, using SPSS and AMOS software:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** Mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and item responses.
2. **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency of the PNMS.
3. **Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis:** Conducted to validate the factor structure of PNMS and confirm the hypothesized Purushartha–Maslow alignment.
4. **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to test the strength of relationships between Purusharthas and Maslow's needs.
5. **ANOVA and t-tests:** Used to examine whether demographic groups (age, gender, profession, education) differed significantly in their motivational orientations.
6. **Regression Analysis:** Applied to explore predictive relationships between Purusharthas and Maslow's levels, thereby testing whether one framework could explain the variance in the other.
7. **Qualitative Analysis:** Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify patterns such as prioritization of Dharma over material success, or reflections on Moksha as a life goal. This qualitative layer enriched the interpretation of quantitative results.

## MAPPING OF PNMS WITH OBJECTIVES (Obj), RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQ), AND HYPOTHESES (H)

PNMS integration	Mapped Concept (Maslow)	Corresponding Purushartha	Linked Objective	Related Research Question (RQ)	Hypothesis (H)
1. I get enough food, rest, and basic health care.	Physiological	Artha	Obj. 1 – Analyze conceptual convergence	RQ1: Do Purusharthas align with Maslow's hierarchy?	H1: Artha aligns with Physiological & Safety needs.
2. I feel secure in my job, relationships, and environment.	Safety	Artha	Obj. 2 – Empirical testing of alignment	RQ2: Do individuals perceive similarities?	H2: Strong correlation between Artha and lower-order needs.
3. I enjoy meaningful personal and social relationships.	Love/Affection/Belonging	Kaama	Obj. 1 – Conceptual convergence	RQ1 & RQ2	H1 & H2: Kama aligns with Love/Belonging needs.
4. I feel appreciated and respected by others.	Esteem	Dharma	Obj. 2 – Empirical testing	RQ2	H2: Dharma aligns significantly with Esteem needs.
5. I strive to realize my full potential and grow as a person.	Self-Actualization	Moksha	Obj. 1 – Conceptual convergence	RQ1: Can Maslow's model be interpreted via Purusharthas?	H1: Moksha aligns with Self-Actualization.
6. I make decisions based on ethics, values, and what is right.	Esteem / Self-Actualization	Dharma	Obj. 3 – Develop PNMS scale	RQ3: Can PNMS reliably measure?	H3: PNMS items (e.g., Dharma–Esteem link) will show high reliability.
7. I pursue material success through righteous means.	Safety / Esteem	Artha	Obj. 2 – Empirical testing	RQ2	H2: Artha pursuit is moderated by Dharma (ethical dimension).
8. I take time to enjoy life's pleasures within moral boundaries.	Love / Esteem	Kama	Obj. 4 – Examine demographic variations	RQ4: Do demographic factors shape interpretation?	H4: Younger respondents prioritize Kama more, older respondents balance Dharma/Kama.
9. I reflect on the purpose of	Self-Actualization	Moksha	Obj. 2 & Obj. 5 – Propose	RQ5: Can Maslow's model be	H5: Moksha extends beyond Self-

life and deeper meanings of existence.			holistic framework	reinterpreted via Purusharthas?	Actualization to spirituality.
10. I try to balance professional success with moral and spiritual growth.	Integration of all levels	Dharma & Moksha	Obj. 5 – Propose integrative framework	RQ5	H5: Motivation is integrative, not strictly hierarchical.

## CORRELATION MATRIX

Maslow's Need	Dharma	Artha	Kaama	Moksha
Physiological	0.21	0.52	0.43	0.10
Safety	0.25	0.58	0.31	0.15
Love & Belonging	0.35	0.41	0.64	0.20
Esteem	0.46	0.39	0.42	0.38
Self-Actualization	0.52	0.27	0.30	0.69

## FACTOR ANALYSIS

- Two dominant factors emerged:
  - ✓ Factor 1 (Worldly Goals): Artha, Kama (loading > 0.6)
  - ✓ Factor 2 (Transcendental Goals): Dharma, Moksha, Self-actualization (loading > 0.7)

## ANOVA

**Hypothesis:** Motivation preferences differ significantly across age groups.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	21.34	2	10.67	4.22	0.018*
Within Groups	182.56	72	2.53		
Total	203.90	74			

( $p < 0.05$ : significant difference found)

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### Maslow's Hierarchy & Four Purusharthas Survey (n=250)

#### Descriptive Statistics (Likert-Scale: 1–5)

Statement	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
I feel safe and secure in my current life situation.	3.56	1.07	1	5
I get enough food, rest, and health care.	3.62	1.06	1	5
I have healthy and supportive relationships.	3.60	1.01	1	5
I am recognized and respected by others.	3.57	1.06	1	5
I am working towards realizing my full potential.	3.43	1.16	1	5

I act according to ethical and moral values in life.	3.50	1.07	1	5
I work diligently to achieve wealth and prosperity in rightful ways.	3.59	0.97	1	5
I enjoy pleasures of life while staying within my values.	3.54	1.09	1	5
I reflect on the deeper meaning and purpose of life.	3.70	1.05	1	5
My goals align with worldly success and spiritual growth.	3.47	0.96	1	5

## DISCUSSION

Preliminary findings of the study indicate notable overlaps, such as the convergence of self-actualization with Moksha, esteem with Dharma, and love/belonging with Kaama. At the same time, divergences are observed: while Maslow's model assumes a progression from deficiency needs to growth needs, the Purusharthas emphasize balance and simultaneous pursuit. This contrast underscores a fundamental epistemological difference: Maslow's model is individual-centered and sequential, whereas the Purusharthas are collective-oriented and integrative. Such differences are not contradictions but complementary perspectives, which together enrich our understanding of human motivation.

The Purusharthas provide a holistic, culturally resonant framework aligning with and extending Maslow's theory. Their integration can enhance motivation models in multicultural management, education, and counseling.

The findings affirm that:

- Artha and Kaama relate strongly with Maslow's lower-level needs (physiological, safety, belonging).
- Dharma and Moksha correlate with higher-order needs (esteem, self-actualization).
- Moksha, although unique to Indian thought, shows significant overlap with Maslow's concept of self-transcendence (added in Maslow's later work).
- The Purushartha framework is not strictly hierarchical; multiple goals can co-exist, unlike Maslow's strict progression.

## INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics indicate that participants moderately to strongly agreed with most items, particularly those related to Moksha (spiritual reflection) and Dharma (ethical conduct). This suggests a latent spiritual orientation even among modern respondents, supporting the claim that Indian individuals may pursue higher-order needs such as self-actualization and transcendence concurrently, not hierarchically in contrast to Maslow's linear model.

ANOVA results (as interpreted separately) revealed statistically significant variations in responses based on gender, education, and professional background, particularly on Dharma- and Artha-related items. For example, students showed stronger alignment with Moksha-related goals, whereas working professionals gave higher ratings to Artha and Kama.

## CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study contributes a pluralistic model of motivation, rooted in both Western psychology and Indian dharma philosophy. The PNMS offers a fresh paradigm to understand personal growth as a multidimensional process one that integrates:

- Material needs (Artha) with
- Moral purpose (Dharma),
- Emotional fulfillment (Kama), and
- Spiritual liberation (Moksha).

Unlike Maslow's framework that often ends with the individual's personal potential, the Purushartha framework expands the scope of motivation to include duty, values, and transcendence, presenting a more integrative view of human development.

## PROPOSED CULTURALLY INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

- **Workplace and HRD:** The model can be applied to create ethics-driven, value-aligned performance systems, especially in Indian or dharma-oriented organizations.
- **Education and Youth Development:** Institutions can design curricula that balance career aspirations (Artha) with value education (Dharma) and life purpose (Moksha).
- **Psychotherapy and Counseling:** Therapists working in multicultural settings can use the PNMS to identify value conflicts or spiritual discontent as sources of psychological tension.
- **Leadership and Policy Making:** Leaders can align organizational vision not just with economic success but with societal and spiritual well-being integrating both Malawians and dharma insights.

## CONCLUSION

Maslow's and Purushartha frameworks seek to explain human aspiration and fulfillment. With increasing globalization and the need for culturally rooted psychological models, it is vital to explore how these paradigms intersect. In Indian contexts especially, individuals often balance the pursuit of Artha and Kama within the bounds of Dharma, while also aspiring for Moksha—an orientation that cannot be fully captured by Maslow's model alone. The theoretical and practical implications of this research are multifold. Conceptually, it contributes to cross-cultural psychology by proposing an alternative model of motivation that blends Western psychological insights with Eastern philosophical wisdom. Practically, the PNMS can be applied in domains such as education (to design curricula that integrate ethical and spiritual dimensions of learning), workplace management (to enhance employee motivation through culturally sensitive strategies), counseling (to address holistic needs of clients), and leadership development (to foster dharma-centered, socially responsible leaders). Policy-wise, the study suggests that culturally responsive motivational frameworks can contribute to societal well-being, by harmonizing material progress with ethical responsibility and spiritual fulfillment.

Finally, this research situates itself in the broader discourse on decolonizing psychology and management studies, which calls for greater inclusion of IKS in academic and practical frameworks. By validating the Purusharthas alongside Maslow's hierarchy, this study not only bridges Eastern and Western paradigms but also underscores the importance of culturally grounded models in the global landscape.

The research study also bridges the two frameworks by investigating their conceptual parallels and empirical alignments. The central proposition is that while Maslow emphasizes a hierarchical progression of needs, the Purusharthas propose an integrative balance of goals, blending material, social, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. For instance, Artha aligns closely with Maslow's physiological and safety needs; Kama resonates with love/belonging; Dharma has strong parallels with esteem needs in its emphasis on social recognition and responsibility; and Moksha bears striking similarity to self-actualization and even transcends it through a spiritual

dimension. Thus, the dialogue between the Purusharthas and Maslow's hierarchy opens the possibility of constructing a culturally nuanced, globally relevant framework of motivation.

This study integrates cultural psychology and spiritual philosophy by validating overlaps between Maslow's universal needs theory and the Indian concept of Purusharthas. While Maslow presents a ladder, Indian philosophy offers a wheel of life goals-dynamic, overlapping, and lifelong. There is strong empirical alignment between the *Purusharthas* and Maslow's needs. The Indian framework offers a spiritual continuum beyond self-actualization (*Moksha*). While Maslow presents a linear model, *Purusharthas* allow for simultaneous pursuit of multiple goals. This study bridges a significant gap in motivational theory by integrating Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with the Four Purusharthas of Indian philosophy Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. The development and empirical application of the Purushartha–Need Mapping Scale (PNMS) provides a culturally grounded framework that captures the pluralistic nature of human aspiration in the Indian context.

The findings suggest that while Maslow's hierarchy presents a sequential model of motivation culminating in self-actualization, the Indian perspective acknowledges the simultaneity and interdependence of material, emotional, ethical, and spiritual goals. Participants in this study did not exclusively prioritize physiological or safety needs before attending to self-realization or ethical considerations. Instead, Dharma and Moksha appeared as central drivers of life satisfaction, alongside the pursuit of Artha and Kama.

The PNMS model thus offers a more integrative and culturally responsive alternative to Western motivational theories. It supports the notion that individuals in collectivistic and spiritually-inclined societies may not progress in a linear fashion but rather engage with multiple dimensions of well-being concurrently. This challenges traditional hierarchical models and opens new avenues for understanding motivational dynamics across cultures.

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