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Kama

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Kāma (Sanskrit, Pali; Devanagari: काम) means desire, wish, longing in Indian literature.^[3] Kāma often connotes sexual desire and longing in contemporary literature, but the concept more broadly refers to any desire, wish, passion, longing, pleasure of the senses, the aesthetic enjoyment of life, affection, or love, with or without sexual connotations.^{[4][5]}

Kāma is one of the four goals of human life in Hindu traditions.^[2] It is considered an essential and healthy goal of human life when pursued without sacrificing the other three goals: Dharma (virtuous, proper, moral life), Artha (material prosperity, income security, means of life) and Moksha (liberation, release, self-actualization).^{[6][7]} Together, these four aims of life are called Puruṣārtha.^[8]

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Definition and meaning

Kāma means “desire, wish or longing”.^[3] In contemporary literature, kāma refers usually to sexual desire.^[2] However, the term also refers to any sensory enjoyment, emotional attraction and aesthetic pleasure such as from arts, dance, music, painting, sculptor and nature.^{[1][9]}

Kama



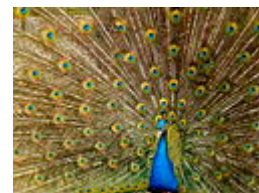
Sexual desire



Deity Kama whose arrows trigger desire



Love



Aesthetic pleasure from arts, nature^[1]

Kāma, in Hinduism, is one of the four goals of human life.^[2] Above illustrate examples of kāma.

The concept *kāma* is found in some of the earliest known verses in Vedas. For example, Book 10 of Rig Veda describes the creation of the universe from nothing by the great heat. There in hymn 129, it states:

**कामस्तदग्रे समवर्षाधि मनसो रेः परथमं यदासीत् ।
सप्तो बन्धुमसि निरविन्दन हृदि परीष्याकवयो मनीषा ॥**^[10]

Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning, Desire the primal seed and germ of Spirit,
Sages who searched with their heart's thought discovered the existent's kinship in the non-existent.

—Rig Veda, ~ 15th Century BC^[11]

Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad, one of the oldest Upanishads of Hinduism, uses the term *kāma*, also in a broader sense, as any desire:

Man consists of desire (*kāma*),
As his desire is, so is his determination,
As his determination is, so is his deed,
Whatever his deed is, that he attains.

—Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, 7th Century BC^[12]

Ancient Indian literature such as the Epics, that followed the Upanishads, develop and explain the concept of *kāma* together with Artha and Dharma. The Mahabharata, for example, provides one of the expansive definitions of *kāma*. The Epic claims *kāma* to be any agreeable and desirable experience (pleasure) generated by the interaction of one of five senses with anything congenial to that sense and while the mind is concurrently in harmony with the other goals of human life (dharma, artha and moksha).^[13]

Kāma often implies the short form of the word *kāmanā* (desire, appetite). *Kāma*, however, is more than *kāmanā*. *Kāma* is an experience that includes the discovery of object, learning about the object, emotional connection, process of enjoyment and the resulting feeling of well being before, during and after the experience.^[9]

Vatsyayana, the author of *Kamasutra*, describes *kāma* as happiness that is a *manasa vyapara* (phenomenon of the mind). Just like the Mahabharata, Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* defines *kāma* as pleasure an individual experiences from the world, with one or more senses - hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling and feeling - in harmony with one's mind and soul.^[6] Experiencing harmonious music is kama, as is being inspired by natural beauty, the aesthetic appreciation of a work of art and admiring with joy something created by another human being. *Kama sutra*, in its discourse on *kāma*, describes many arts, dance and music forms, along with sex as means to pleasure and enjoyment.^[13]

John Lochtefeld explains^[2] *kāma* as desires, noting that it often refers to sexual desire in contemporary literature, but in ancient Indian literature *kāma* includes any kind of attraction and pleasure such as those from the arts.

Karl Potter describes^[14] kama as an attitude and capacity. A little girl who hugs her teddy bear with a smile is experiencing kama, as are two lovers in embrace. During these experiences, the person connects and identifies the loved as part of oneself, feels more complete, fulfilled and whole by experiencing that connection and nearness. This, in the Indian perspective, is *kāma*.^[14]

Hindery notes the inconsistent and diverse exposition of *kāma* in various ancient texts of India. Some texts, such as the Epic Ramayana, paint *kāma* through the desire of Rama for Sita, one that transcends the physical and marital into a love that is spiritual, and something that gives Rama his meaning of life, his reason to live.^[15] Both Sita and Rama, frequently express their unwillingness and inability to live without the other.^[16] This romantic and spiritual view of *kāma* in the Ramayana by Valmiki is quite different, claim Hindery^[15] and others,^[17] than the normative and dry description of *kāma* in the law codes of *smṛiti* by Manu for example.

Gavin Flood explains^[18] *kāma* as “love” without violating *dharma* (moral responsibility), *artha* (material prosperity) and one’s journey towards *moksha* (spiritual liberation).

Kāma in Hinduism

In Hinduism, *kāma* is regarded as one of the four proper and necessary goals of human life (*purusharthas*), the others being *Dharma* (virtuous, proper, moral life), *Artha* (material prosperity, income security, means of life) and *Moksha* (liberation, release, self-actualization).^{[7][20]}

Relative precedence between Kama, Artha, and Dharma

Ancient Indian literature emphasizes that *dharma* precedes and is essential. If *dharma* is ignored, *artha* and *kama* lead to social chaos.^[21]

Vatsyayana in *Kama Sutra* recognizes relative value of three goals as follows: *artha* precedes *kama*, while *dharma* precedes both *kama* and *artha*.^[6] Vatsyayana, in Chapter 2 of *Kama sutra*, presents a series of philosophical objections argued against *kama* and then offers his answers to refute those objections. For example, one objection to *kāma* (pleasure, enjoyment), acknowledges Vatsyayana, is this concern that *kāma* is an obstacle to moral and ethical life, to religious pursuits, to hard work, and to productive pursuit of prosperity and wealth. The pursuit of pleasure, claim objectors, encourages individuals to commit unrighteous deeds, bring distress, carelessness, levity and suffering later in life.^[22] These objections were then answered by Vatsyayana, with the declaration that *kāma* is as necessary to human beings as food, and *kāma* is holistic with *dharma* and *artha*.

Kama is necessary for existence

Just like good food is necessary for the well being of the body, good pleasure is necessary for healthy existence of a human being, suggests Vatsyayana.^[23] A life without pleasure and enjoyment - sexual, artistic, of nature - is hollow and empty. Just like no one should stop farming crops even though everyone knows herds of deer exist and will try to eat the crop as it grows up, in the same way claims Vatsyayana, one should not stop one's pursuit of *kāma* because dangers exist. *Kama* should be followed with thought, care, caution and enthusiasm, just like farming or any other life pursuit.^[23]

Vatsyayana's book the *Kama Sutra*, in parts of the world, is presumed or depicted as a synonym for creative sexual positions; in reality, only 20% of *Kama Sutra* is about sexual positions. The majority of the book, notes



Kāma is celebrated in many Hindu temples, such as Khajuraho and the Konark Temple (above).^[19]

Jacob Levy,^[24] is about the philosophy and theory of love, what triggers desire, what sustains it, how and when it is good or bad. Kama Sutra presents kama as an essential and joyful aspect of human existence.^[25]

Kama is holistic

Vatsyayana claims kama is never in conflict with dharma or artha, rather all three coexist and kama results from the other two.^[6]

A man practicing Dharma, Artha and Kama enjoys happiness now and in future. Any action which conduces to the practice of Dharma, Artha and Kama together, or of any two, or even one of them should be performed. But an action which conduces to the practice of one of them at the expense of the remaining two should not be performed.

—Vatsyayana, *The Kama sutra, Chapter 2*^[26]

Pleasure in general, sexual pleasure in particular, is neither shameful nor dirty, in Hindu philosophy. It is necessary for human life, essential for well being of every individual, and wholesome when pursued with due consideration of dharma and artha. Unlike the precepts of some religions, kāma is celebrated in Hinduism, as a value in its own right.^[27] Together with artha and dharma, it is an aspect of a holistic life.^{[9][28]} All three *purusharthas* - Dharma, Artha and Kama - are equally and simultaneously important.^[29]

Kama and stage of life

Some^{[6][30]} ancient Indian literature observe that the relative precedence of artha, kama and dharma are naturally different for different people and different age groups. In a baby or child, education and kāma (artistic desires) take precedence; in youth kāma and artha take precedence; while in old age dharma takes precedence.

Kama as deity

Kāma is personified as deity Kamadeva and his consort Rati. Deity Kama is comparable to the Greek deity Eros - they both trigger human sexual attraction and sensual desire.^{[2][8]} Kama rides a parrot, and the deity is armed with bow and arrows to pierce hearts. The bow is made of sugarcane stalk, the bowstring is a line of bees, and the arrows are tipped with five flowers representing five emotions-driven love states.^[31] The five flowers on Kama arrows are lotus flower (infatuation), ashoka flower (intoxication with thoughts about the other person), mango flower (exhaustion and emptiness in absence of the other), jasmine flower (pinning for the other) and blue lotus flower (paralysis with confusion and feelings). Kama is also known as *Ananga* (literally "one without body") because desire strikes formlessly, through feelings in unseen ways.^[2] The other names for deity Kama include Madan (he who intoxicates with love), Manmatha (he who agitates the mind), Pradyumna (he who conquers all) and Kushumesu (he whose arrows are flowers).^[32]

Kama in Buddhism

In Buddhism's Pali Canon, the Gautama Buddha renounced (Pali: *nekkhamma*) sensuality (*kāma*) in route to his Awakening.^[33] Some Buddhist lay practitioners recite daily the Five Precepts, a commitment to abstain from "sexual misconduct" (*kāmesu micchācāra*).^[34] Typical of Pali Canon discourses, the Dhammika Sutta (Sn 2.14) includes a more explicit correlate to this precept when the Buddha enjoins a follower to "observe celibacy or at

least do not have sex with another's wife."^[35]

Theosophy: kama, kamarupa and kamaloka

In the Theosophy of Blavatsky, Kama is the fourth principle of the septenary, associated with emotions and desires, attachment to existence, volition, and lust.^[36]

Kamaloka is a *semi*-material plane, subjective and invisible to humans, where disembodied "personalities", the astral forms, called Kama-rupa remain until they fade out from it by the complete exhaustion of the effects of the mental impulses that created these idolons of human and animal passions and desires. It is associated with Hades of ancient Greeks and the Amenti of the Egyptians, the land of Silent Shadows; a division of the first group of the *Trailōkya*.

See also

- Dharma
- Artha
- Moksha
- Purushartha
- Kaam, a word with a similar meaning
- Cupid
- Kama sutra
- Alcmaeon (mythology)
- Buddhist_cosmology_of_the_Theravada_school

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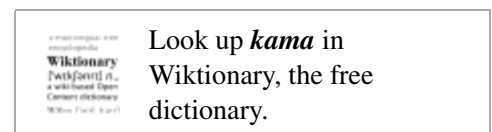
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External links

- About.com page (<http://experts.about.com/e/k/ka/kamadeva.htm/>)
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