

Ashram Dharma

Presented by

Dr. Prabhakar Pandey

HoD, Alternative Education and Holistic Development

Sanchi University of Buddhist Indic Studies

Email- prabhakar.pandey@subis.edu.in

The foundations of the four Ashramas

- The Indic Sastrakars or the Sastra-writers have taken man into account as a social being with regard to four broad factors that influenced his life and conduct. He is considered in relation to (i) Desh (place) which is said to be the regional approach to the study of society; (ii) Kala (time), which constitutes the historical approach to the study of society; (iii) Srama (effort) which takes into account his nurture and development in his environment; and (iv) Guna (natural traits), which refers to the natural and inherent psychological environment of a man.

Word meaning of the Ashrama

- The word ashrama is derived from the Sanskrit root shrama to exert oneself'. Thus it may mean (i) a place where exertions are performed and (ii) the action of performing such exertions. s Literally an ashrama is a 'halting or resting place'. The word thus signifies a halt, a stoppage or stage in the journey of life just for the sake of rest; in a sense in order to prepare oneself for further journey. Thus the 'ashrama' are regarded as resting places or work-places during one's journey on the way to final liberation which is the final aim of life.

The ashramas are four in number

- (1) The Brahmacharya- that of student
- (2) The Garhastha- that of married man, the house- holder
- (3) The Vanaprastha- that of a retired life in the forest after abandoning the home, preparatory to complete renouncement of worldly relations
- (4) The Sannyas- the life of complete renunciation of worldly relations and attachments

The Brahmacharya ashrama

- In the ancient ages the pupil had to live with his teacher and through dialogue got to the tenets of teachings and this stage of learning was known Brahmacharyasrama. After the Brahmacharya period was over, the pupil had to take a dip in water and then with the permission of the teacher returned home to start the second stage in his life namely garhastha. Because of the dip in water, pupil was called snatak symbolizing one who has taken a bath in the water of learning.

- In ancient time the education that a snatak had with his teacher has been finely expressed thus : "Both the teacher and the pupil referring to Brahama prayed thus : Please protect us both and give both of us fruits of education equally. Let us equally acquire the ability to have learning. Let the efforts of both of us in learning be successful. Let us not envy each other"

The Garhasthasrama

- On return to the house the garhastha system would come into being. The Brahmachari now is to set up his family. To this end marriage became a necessity. It is to be noted that marriage is a social institution with the family or family is a social institution of which marriage is a part. Now garhastha ashrama that is the house holder's life starts.

The Vanaprasthashrama

- In the third ashrama the beginnings are made for the yielding of the same for the final yajna which is expected to be performed in the last ashrama. The individual now gives up his fields of artha and kama by leaving his near and dear ones, his family (kula), his village (grama) and by abandoning his belongings and possession. He now goes out into the forest (bana), for meditation and service to others and, he trains himself up for the execution of the final yajna of the sannyas ashrama, the last ashrama.

Sannyas

- The last ashrama provides the fullest opportunity for the self expression and self expansion of the individual in terms of the final yajna. Sannyas means a complete offering of the self (atmahuti) for the achievement of the true spirit of life and its perfection. Then the self surrenders all that was nearest and dearest to its lower ego, in order that thereby and thereafter it may enable itself to be one with the real self (the Paramatma).

- Through Sannyas the individual becomes, a yajñibhakta. He has undergone the schooling and discipline from stage to stage, ashrama to ashrama, realising more and more that neither he belongs to this samsar (the world in appearance where the self cherishes all desires and longs to enjoy) nor this samsar belongs to him . He now realises fully the place and meaning of the self in the midst of samsar and he brings himself face to face with the final aim of all existence, namely moksha in the last stage.

