

While the two great epics mention dharma as the goal of life, they do not consider mokṣa as one of the goals of human life. Benjamin Khan (1983: 42) feels that either the notion of mokṣa is of a later origin than the notion of dharma or it is a later addition to the Vedic Triad—dharma, artha, kāma. With the addition of the fourth stage in the school of life, mokṣa, the fourth value of life came to be added. Hiriyanā (1952: 102) does not subscribe to such a view. He says, ‘Mokṣa, dharma, artha and kāma are four values of life. Early works like *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* often refer to three alone. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that the fourth value was not known at that time. The absence of the ideal of mokṣa from the works of these writers implies only that the writers in question addressed themselves chiefly to the common folks, for whom this final ideal was of little value.’ The inter-relation between dharma, artha and kama is brought out by Vālmīki through the various episodes of *Rāmāyaṇa*, including the episode of Hanumān at the court of Rāvaṇa. Hanumān sees the majestic Rāvaṇa seated on his beautiful throne in Lankā, surrounded by all kinds of riches. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Sundarakāṇḍa: 49, 20) Hanumān explains that if Rāvaṇa had not been antagonistic to dharma he would have been the patron of the entire kingdom of gods, including Indra, the king of gods. It is through such stories and parables that the idea of *dhārmic* conduct is conveyed. Thus while sādharmaṇadharmas like ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacharya, aparigraha (truth, non-violence, self-control, not to steal and not to covet) were spelt out, dharma in relation to artha and kāma was taught through the many legends, stories and myths embedded in the tradition. Dharma in the epics is to be understood as a practical aspect of life and hence dharma remains in consonance with the values that a society holds in high esteem and so can differ from society to society and from time to time in the same society.

Mokṣa means liberation from saṃsāra (the transient world, the cycle of birth and rebirth) and therefore is separate from the other three achievements of life. Dharma being the regulator of kāma and artha, is a mode of life or a code of conduct. It regulates



[*The eternal quest for truth and mokṣa—liberation from the transient world and rebirth*

a man’s work and activities and aims at the maintenance of the world order whereas mokṣa deliberately rejects it. Krishan (1989:67) goes a step further and says that the very premise of mokṣa is the negation of dharma. In fact Dandekar observes as mentioned by Khan (1983:44), that ‘mokṣa’ falls outside the orbit of the socio-functional theory of the puruṣārthas. There is a conceptual disparity and discontinuity between the trivarga and mokṣa: mokṣa implies transcending