

the phenomenal world. Mokṣa means release from the continued embodied existence, and the isolation of the soul from the non-soul. Mokṣa is personalistic and not social. Mokṣa is other worldly and implies a renunciation; a total severance of all ties with the family and society and all laws and customs regulating it. Mokṣa aims at cessation of activity, of change, of the cycle of births and deaths, whereas dharma is a desire for betterment of the individual in social and moral terms. However, Ingalls (1959) says that in the epic text and in most orthodox literature mokṣa was not thought to be gained by any radically different means or techniques from that by which one gains dharma. Renunciation does not mean running away from the world. It signifies renouncing the desire for worldly enjoyment.

Vālmiki regards dharma as the object or goal of life. Vālmiki asks Nārada about the ideal man whose footsteps a man may follow to release himself. Along with dharma, artha and kāma, Vālmiki in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Kīśkindhā Kāṇḍa: 18-4) also mentions *lokācāra* (conventions followed by the virtuous) as the fourth moral standard of action:

*Dharmam arthanca kāmañ ca  
samayam cāpi laukikam.*<sup>13</sup>

(Dharma, artha, kāma and *lokācāra* are the four moral standards of action)

Vālmiki's introduction of the fourth element is due to the fact that wherever there is no clear indication about some duty in the *śāstras*, then convention should be followed or the conduct of the virtuous should be the criterion to settle the disputed point. It is said in the *Mahābhārata*, 'There are different *Vedas* and different *smṛtis*, there is no one sage whose word is an authority. The essence of dharma is hidden in a cave. A man should follow the path-followed by righteous people.' (Araṇya Parva: CCCXIII. 17)

Vālmiki does not believe in the mechanical observance of dharma, which was generally understood during that time as a fixed moral conduct. He does not believe that dharma is fixed and unalterable through eternity and therefore Lakshmana, after hearing that Rāma has agreed to fulfil his father's vows, could make the following statement, 'Rāma, you may be wise, but your judgement has been perverted by your dharma; I detest such a dharma.' (Ayodhyā Kānda: XXI. 23) Vālmiki does not believe in any



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