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## VALUES, NON-VIOLENCE AND ECOLOGY: TWO APPROACHES

Indian thought has casually been charged as not having developed critical ethics. In numerous ancient writings there are long lists of virtues to be observed in practical life, but the ethical theory as such may seem inadequate to some Westerners. The West has fairly recently developed, particularly through the English medium, formal ethics. Hence we have quite a few books on General Moral Theory and on Descriptive Ethics. However, the reader may not, after studying several of these books, have the slightest idea of how this reading has helped him in knowing what is right and what is wrong in any actual situation of his life.

Nevertheless, in *Karma* theory or Philosophy of Action and in Value Theory, Indian Schools are not "less developed." It may be that the classification of numerous virtues relates to those virtues that belong to practical life or that are corollaries of the moral guidelights of life.

Indian schools of thought may not, if we want to be a little snobbish, be called "ethics," but rather "values." Moreover, Indian ethics is, in principle, teleological and not deontological. Moral behaviour is not good for its own sake, but because it serves a good purpose. Right behaviour is instrumental to a good aim. The theory is thus found more intimately in connection with the end served by action than with the nature of goodness or beauty of the action itself.

The innumerable virtues, for instance non-violence, mental peace, non-attachment, service of the preceptor, self-control, devotion to God, etc., are basically not to be discussed merely as having a moral value. Moral behaviour serves as an instrument either to a social or a spiritual end.

There are two terms in the orthodox, Vedas recognizing thought, which are used to imply a group of values. *Trivarga*, "the aggregate of three values," includes *dharma*, socio-ethical good, *artha*, economic

good and *kāma*, psycho-hedonistic good. Another term *puruṣārtha* or "good of man" includes these three values and, besides, *mokṣa* or emancipation, the ultimate end of life as a fourth value.

These two aggregates cover comprehensively the Hindu ideas of value. It appears that, in the Vedic tradition, *trivarga* is a more original and historically earlier value-system. The fourth value *mokṣa* was added to the three former values at the time of the earliest *Upaniṣads*. But, even then, there was a continuation of the *trivarga* system also as self-sufficient within the four-value system.

Thus there are two different value-systems, one aiming at mundane welfare or *saṃsāra*, the other aiming at individual spiritual emancipation or *mokṣa*. It seems to me that it is difficult philosophically to derive *mokṣa* from mundane welfare. *Mokṣa* is in many ways a negation of *saṃsāra*. It is a counter-charge against welfare or a counter-check opposed to *saṃsāra*.

There is a gap or a conceptual break in continuity between *mokṣa* and the mundane welfare. Philosophically, the gap is irrational and can at best be described as *neti, neti*, as a negation of something positive or by a negation of various negations.

Thus there are two contrary Moral Philosophies in India. They are opposed to each other in tendency. I may call them Vedic and ascetic. The Vedic Philosophy is based directly on the way of life of the early Aryans who invaded India from the West.

The ascetic philosophy includes the non-Vedic ideas of the Jains and Buddhists. The *Yoga* and *Sāṅkhya* schools had their roots in the Indus culture. We may generalize: the ascetic movement, including some of the earlier *Upaniṣads*, was not based on the Aryan Vedas, but on the original pre-Vedic cultures of India. The ascetic counter-cultural ideology was most probably rooted in the suppressed, militarily and politically defeated remnants of the natives.

The cultural difference between the two originally distinct cultures is most clear in terms of values. In the *R̥gveda* there are innumerable prayers for protection. Gods are urged not to harm the supplicant himself,

his family and domestic animals, cows and horses.<sup>1</sup> Protection from thieves and enemies,<sup>2</sup> and from harmful criticism, too, is asked for.<sup>3</sup> That the enemy or opponent be liquidated and one's strength increased is also prayed for on various occasions.<sup>4</sup>

Bodily health, welfare and happiness are valued.<sup>5</sup> Wealth in the form of jewels, horses, cows, food, or even a hundred towns to rule over, are repeatedly asked for.<sup>6</sup> Wishes for a long life, progeny and fame are expressed.<sup>7</sup>

Vedic people seem mostly to have valued physical protection, property as food, cows and horses, long life and health, progeny, particularly brave and skilled sons, removal of sin and lease of immortality. Their concern was mainly with the necessities of biological life and security.

Anyway, instead of seen values, the tradition based on the ascetic sources gives attention to unseen values. A Jain source relates that study of the *sastras*, if done according to one's capacity and with devotion, will bring forth an unexpected result in this world, and in the future, too.<sup>8</sup> It is widely held that a proper action brings forth a good result even when not immediately recognized, or when the immediate result is adverse. Sometimes the result may be delayed because of some obstacle. Therefore, observation of merely seen results may give very little information about the fruits of action, the most valued fruits being by their very nature unseen.

Thus we may consider highly probable that Indian, even Vedic culture after the first *Upaniṣads*, adopted the sramanic culture to its lap. Since then the Vedic majority culture and the originally depressed civilization have grown to be on reciprocal terms with each other. It is difficult to provide any immediate proof of this fact, it is merely a justified assumption based on circumstantial evidence.

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1. *Rgveda* 1. 114. 7-8.

2. *Ibid.*, 2.23.16.

3. *Ibid.*, 1. 18. 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 1. 2. 9; 2. 23. 17.

5. *Ibid.*, 1. 93. 7; 1. 90. 3; 1. 25. 19; 7. 16. 8; 1. 143. 8.

6. *Ibid.*, 1. 43. 2; 1. 48. 1; 1. 157. 2; 7. 16. 10.

7. *Ibid.*, 8. 48. 4; 7. 16. 4; 8. 59. 7.

8. *Sagaradharmamṛta* 8. 78.

What best remained or survived out of the pre-Aryan cultures was the sramanic movement, because the ascetics could withdraw to the woods or to isolation. For during many centuries, though, Indian culture greatly benefited from the dialogue between the two originally different and may be even mutually hostile cultures. The sramanic culture was grafted on or inserted into the Vedic trunk.

I will take one concrete example of the reciprocal influence of the originally different ideologies. There are, as I see it, two different ideas of *ahimsā* in Indian thought. I may label them 'sramanic' and 'Vedic'. The former is, for instance, mentioned in the *Śāṅḍilya-Upaniṣad*.<sup>9</sup> It means not to cause suffering to any living being at any time either by mental, vocal or bodily activities. The Jainas, Buddhists and Yogins approve the idea of *ahimsā* in this sense. The point is that any intentional act causing harm or suffering to any living being is to be labelled as '*himsā*'. Therefore, *ahimsā*, as a concept, is also applied to all living beings.

However, the moral tradition based on the originally Vedic sources seems to be different. In the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* we find an important Vedic statement regarding *ahimsā*. He who practises non-violence towards all creatures, except at holy places, will not return to this world again.<sup>10</sup> This statement allows of the killing of animals at sacrifices.

But it is not only that killing is sometimes morally right, or is a morally permissible type of violence, it is under certain conditions to be *ahimsā*. Manu appears to say that the *himsā* prescribed in the *Vedas* should be construed to mean *ahimsā*, because moral duties spring from the prescriptions in the *Vedas*.<sup>11</sup> This Vedic conception of non-violence is expressed in a clear form in the *Mahābhārata*: the violence done to an evil-doer (*asādhu-himsā*) for maintaining worldly affairs in *ahimsā*.<sup>12</sup> This means that "violence to an evil-doer" is bracketed with the concept of "*ahimsā*".

In the *Yajurveda*, a wish for universal friendliness is expressed: May all other beings look at me with a friendly eye, may I do likewise, and

9. 1. 1.

10. 8. 15. 1.

11. 5. 44.

12. *Santi - Parva* 15. 49.

may we all look on each other with the eyes of a friend.<sup>13</sup> These words could be taken to signify the various stages in the development of a basic moral idea. First, man desired that others might treat him in a friendly way, only then he found others desiring the same in an analogy to his own self. Finally the wish was made into a universal rule.

In the early Vedas 'not to violate' was as a verb used in an amoral sense. It was prayed that "I may not be injured physically" and that "my family, friends and my cattle may not be injured." It was only later that the verb 'not to violate' and the noun 'non-violence' gained a moral sense. One's own subjective wish, not to be violated, was reciprocated. It was addressed as a duty also to oneself. Besides, animal sacrifices were criticized and the value of animal life may not have been out of Aryan origin. Because of this, non-violence was extended to all living beings: *sarvabhūta*.

Primarily the Vedic tradition recognizes *kāma*, the psycho-hedonistic value, as the primary and most comprehensive value. It is a naturalistic value, and all living things observe it as a life-force. The etymological meaning of *kāma* is desire. *kāma* as a hedonistic desire or pleasure is an extended meaning of the original sense of the word.

*Kāma* as a naturalistic value is attached to all life, not merely human. Hence, irrespective of what human beings are conscious of and strive for, all life has value. The higher values, as *dharma* and *mokṣa* which are practised by men only, do not negate *kāma* as a value. The higher values rather specify *kāma*. In the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says he is *kāma* in all beings not in conflict with *dharma*.<sup>14</sup> There are even references to "*mokṣa-kāma*". Hence all life is "holy" in the sense that it has value by itself, inherently.

Yet *kāma* as such functions wantonly. Therefore, a limit and specification is needed for rational beings. One of the most basic meanings of *dharma* seems to be coloured by social concern in apposition to the empirical fact that there are many beings who may suffer injury due to wanton or selfish action. *Dharma* is explained as making violent

13. *Yajurveda* 36.18.

14. 7.11.

beings non-violent.<sup>15</sup> All *dharma* and *artha* are hidden in *ahimsā*.<sup>16</sup> *Ahimsā* is said to be the essence of *dharma*.<sup>17</sup>

It may be that the idea of *dharma* has developed as response to a social concern: Man is not alone in the universe, there are other resembling beings as well. In a basic sense *dharma* means non-injury of living beings. Logically, in the most developed sense, it means non-injury of all living beings. As a universalized idea, this refers to all beings capable of realizing *kāma* in their own life.

*Dharma* has been primarily declared for ensuring the non-violability of all living beings. In this negative sense moral responsibility is unlimited. It is an ideal, it is not merely confined to the subjects of the existing society, not even to all human beings.

But, to be practised in actual life, *dharma* gained a positive content in the form of *varna-āsrma-dharma*. The pursuit of mundane welfare limited the practice of *ahimsa* as a universal moral norm. The three-value-system therefore allows the practice of *ahimsa* only so far as it is pragmatic in economic, social and political life.

Ascetics, however, were not limited in their ethical pursuit by the values of *samsāra* or mundane welfare. Other moral norms, such as for instance, *asteya*, non-stealing, focused their attention from seen to objects unseen. They did not hanker after goods which were not really needed or were not beneficial for a spiritual gain. Ascetics could apply *ahimsā* to all living beings with radically less limitations in comparison to laymen. So they even excluded Vedic violence from the concept of non-violence. To kill an animal at a sacrifice was not an act of "non-violence," not even a morally approved type of violence.

Ascetics may not have applied *ahimsā* basically because of the good of other beings, but because of their own spiritual good. Violence, even when socially pragmatic, is an expression of bad or mixed

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15. *Śāntiparva* 69. 57.

16. *Ibid.*, 245. 19.

17. *Cānakyaśāstra* 561.

motives which harm the doer himself. *Kāma* in all beings was not the primary motive, but freedom from the taint of an individual's own immoral action. For an ascetic, non-violence was morally obligatory primarily because of his own spiritual good, yet this good implied the non-violability of all beings.

It is my hypothesis that Indian Philosophy, especially the Moral Philosophy has two different origins, mundane welfare and a counter-cultural movement. Both these traditions seem to relate *ahimsā* to ecology in two different ways, and that is a matter of values.