

UNTO TÄHTINEN

## TWO SOURCES OF INDIAN CULTURE

Indian thought has casually been charged as not having developed critical ethics. There are in numerous ancient writings long lists of virtues to be observed in practical life, but ethical theory as such may seem to be inadequate to some Westerners. The West has fairly recently developed, particularly through 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 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 guidelines of life.

Indian schools of thought may not, if we want to be a little snobbish, be called "ethics" but rather "values". Indian ethics is, moreover, in principle teleological and not deontological. Moral behaviour is not good for its own sake but because it served a good purpose. Right behaviour is instrumental to a good aim. The theory is thus found more intimately in connection to the end served by action than to 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 has been continuation of the *trivarga* system also as a self-sufficient system within the four-value system.

Thus there are two different value-systems, one aiming at mundane welfare or

*sañsāra* and 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 *sañsāra*. It is a counter-charge against welfare or a counter-check opposed to *sañsāra*.

There is a gap or a conceptual break in continuity between mundane welfare and *mokṣa*. 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 in tendency to each other. I may call them Vedic and ascetic. The Vedic philosophy is based directly to the way of life of the early Aryans who invaded India from the West.

The ascetic philosophy includes the non-Vedic ideals of the Jainas 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 different cultures is most clear in 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> also from harmful criticism is asked for.<sup>3</sup> Liquidation of the enemy or opponent and increase of strength are prayed for on various occasions.<sup>4</sup>

Bodily health, welfare and happiness are valued.<sup>5</sup> Wealth in terms of jewels, horses, cows, food, even hundred towns to rule over are repeatedly asked for.<sup>6</sup> Wishes for long life, progeny and good 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, the tradition based on the ascetic sources is not giving attention to seen values, but on unseen values. A Jain source relates that study of the *śāstras*, if done according to one's capacity and with devotion, brings forth 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,

<sup>1</sup> *R̥gveda* 1.114.7-8.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 2.23.16.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 1.18.3.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 1.2.9; 2.23.17.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 1.93.7; 1.90.3; 1.25.19; 7.16.8; 1.143.8.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 1.43.2; 1.48.1; 1.157.2; 7.16.10.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 8.48.4; 7.16.4; 8.59.7.

<sup>8</sup> *Sāgāradharmāmṛta* 8.78.

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 śramanic culture to its lap. Since then the Vedic majority culture and the originally depressed civilization did come to have reciprocal relations with each other. It is difficult to provide any direct proof of this fact, it is just a justified assumption based on a circumstantial evidence.

What best remained or survived out of the pre-Aryan cultures was the śramanic movement because the ascetics could retire to forest or to an isolation even when the towns were destroyed.

Anyway during many centuries Indian culture was greatly benefited by the dialogue between the two originally different and possibly mutually hostile cultures. The śramanic culture was grafted or inserted into the Vedic trunk.

I may 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 'śramanic' and 'Vedic'. The former is, for instance, mentioned in the *Sāṅdilya-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 '*himśā*'. 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, does not return to this world again.<sup>10</sup> This statement allows killing of animals at sacrifices.

But it is not only that killing is sometimes morally right, or is morally allowed type of violence, it is under certain conditions to be *ahimsā*.

Manu says that the *himśā* 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 appears in a clear form also in the *Mahābhārata*: the violence done to an evil-doer (*asādhu-himśā*) for maintaining worldly affairs is *ahimsā*.<sup>12</sup> This means that violence to an evil-doer is bracketed with the concept of *ahimsā*.

In the early *Vedas* "not to violate" was as a verb used in a non-moral 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 a noun 'non-violence' gained a moral sense. Animal sacrifices were criticized and the value of animal life may not have been out of Aryan origin.

<sup>9</sup> 1.1.

<sup>10</sup> 8.15.1.

<sup>11</sup> 5.44.

<sup>12</sup> *Sānti-Parva* 15.49.

It is my hypothesis, still lacking a direct proof, that Indian philosophy, especially the moral philosophy has two different origins, mundane welfare and a counter-cultural element, a 'green movement', if we use a modern term.