

UNTO TÄHTINEN

INDIAN TRADITIONAL VALUES

1. 'Value' and 'disvalue' as a pair of opposites

Human life is guided by a pair of opposites held as good or bad, right or wrong, nice or nasty, wise or foolish. Some aims and results of action are judged praise-worthy, others unworthy. The unworthy aims may, by linguistic signs, be extended to existing states which have to be rejected. We may apply contemporary terms 'value' and 'disvalue' to this pair of opposites. On the basis of *Manusmṛti* it may be inferred that social good cannot exist without social evil, and vice versa, as pleasure cannot exist without pain¹. There is no good without non-good.

The value terms are numerous; some of them are used in a precise meaning; many are but non-technical. In the *Mahābhārata* some social acts are said to lead to *puṇya*, good or merit². Practice of three values particularly has the result of *vi-jaya*, mental or material growth³. A work on policy calls that which is in agreement with these three main values *sarva-artha-siddhi*, accomplishment of all values. If we look for a single term, *artha* may be used in the meaning of a good result of action or good aim⁴. Correspondingly *anartha* signifies disvalue or non-good.

It is said that intentional killing by a *ksatriya* living a retired life causes his fall from his position⁵. We may infer from this both social and spiritual loss. One faces downfall due to improper action⁶. Downfall from an already held position implies a valuational insight.

Some Indian value-ideals are taken to their logical conclusions, as for instance it is stated that those who forgive others 'cross over the ocean of bodily existence'⁷. But sometimes these types of expressions are rather general in nature. Protection of his subjects leads a king to *siddhi*, perfection⁸. By meritorious deeds a man attains *para-loka*, the supreme world⁹.

It may be that after experiencing bodily existence as a bondage we can infer its cessation or negation to be good. Similarly finding suffering or pain as a disvalue, we conclude that non-suffering is good, albeit permanent non-suffering an even greater good.

Thus value seems to be a comparative judgement in view of the corresponding disvalue, or simply expressive of the intention to make disvalue non-existing. Hence good and non-good are a pair of opposites, likewise merit and demerit.

2. Vedic values

In the R̥gveda there are innumerable prayers for protection. Gods are urged not to harm the suppliant himself, his family and domestic animals, cows and horses¹⁰. Protection from thieves and enemies¹¹, also from harmful criticism is asked for¹². Liquidation of the enemy or opponent and increase of strength are prayed for on various occasions¹³.

Bodily health, welfare and happiness are valued¹⁴. Wealth in terms of jewels, horses, cows, food, even a hundred towns to rule over, are repeatedly asked for¹⁵. Wishes for a long life, progeny and fame are expressed¹⁶. "May we see a hundred autumns, may we live a hundred autumns"¹⁷. Gods are prayed to grant brave sons, eyesight, hearing capacity and long life¹⁸.

In addition, Indra and Varuṇa are prayed to to eliminate sins, bad action, mental pain and downfall¹⁹. Gods are requested to bestow right thinking, attainment of truth, removal of falsehood, intelligence and verbal knowledge²⁰. Immortality, *amṛtatva*, is prayed for, as also the goddess Nirṛti is asked to liberate one from sin²¹.

Vedic people seem mostly to have valued 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.

3. Human life aims as values

Indians view terrestrial life as having a purpose or aim. This world is the door to heaven and salvation. Earth is said to fulfil all desires²². The saying may imply that earth is a vehicle of values, it is either meant or exploited for realizing values.

One should protect one's body as a prerequisite for the practice of values²³. Body is the birthplace of both merit and demerit²⁴; hence the human body itself is a vehicle of values.

Further, we may take cognizance of special fields and avenues of life and ask what is the good of culture, medical science and religion. What is the purpose of philosophy?

The medical science of Āyurveda is for the destruction of diseases, leading to a good physical life and the welfare of the people²⁵. Health is the basic foundation of values, whereas diseases are the destroyers of health and life²⁶. Diseases obstruct good actions, they are impediments to study and moral behaviour, so by bestowing bodily happiness and long life a physician becomes a donor of values pertaining to both the worlds, this and the future one²⁷.

A thoughtful king should know *caturvarga*, the four values through sciences²⁸, i.e., sciences are considered to be instrumental for knowing values.

The Nyāya philosophy deals mostly with problems of epistemology and logic. Yet it has a purpose: its ultimate end, like that of the other systems of Indian philosophy, is *mokṣa*, liberation; thereby true knowledge of objects is an indispensable means and *via media* of values²⁹. Heinrich Zimmer writes that in the Orient philosophy is directed to the attainment of a higher state of being. Philosophy is but one of many kinds of knowledge leading to human transformation; it has a practical end³⁰.

Not only philosophy and science but also a political state can be considered to be instrumental to values. Following *nyāya* legality a king attains himself and helps his subjects to attain *trivarga*, the three values. Otherwise he injures himself and his subjects³¹.

State is the root of *artha*, economic value. *Artha* is the root of *dharma*, socio-ethical value. And *dharma* is the root of happiness³². So social institutions are also helpful for realising values. Thanks to a helpful wife a householder attains the fruits of the three values³³. Religion is good for the attainment of the four values: by worshipping the feet of the god Viṣṇu man attains them³⁴.

Thus human life as a whole, philosophy, sciences, state, civil society and religion are all instruments for realising values. A formal answer to the question 'why do we live?' is simple: to negate disvalues and to realise values. That is the purpose of human life. On this point all Indian schools of thought are unanimous.

4. 'Seen' and 'unseen' nature of value

Some value-objects like long life, wealth in the form of cows, horses and even certain social institutions exist in the 'seen' world; they can be perceived by the senses. Other value-objects are 'unseen', some of them even, in a strict sense, unexpressible by speech. In the Ṛgveda it is stated that by sacrifice one realises that state which is for ordinary people merely expressible in speech, but is internally realised by the seers³⁵.

Vedic verbal statements are said to be of various types and there is no seer whose view on the basis of mere reasoning, *tarka*, can be held a valid source of knowledge. The essence of merit is hidden in a cave or is unseen³⁶. Thus there have been doubts as to how far values, as *dharma* in the form of merit, can be expressed verbally.

Even hedonistic pleasure, *prīti*, brought forth by experiencing objects of enjoyment, is a type of desire inherent in the mind. This desire is strictly speaking unseen³⁷.

According to the Mīmāṃsā view there are three types of actions with regard to results: (1) actions of which *svarga*, 'heaven' or happiness is the result as mentioned in the Vedas, (2) actions of which there is no mention of a result and (3) actions of which certain results other than heaven are mentioned³⁸. In the first two cases the results of action which is unmixed happiness is unseen from an empirical point of view.

It is a general belief that human life is affected by past and present action. *Daiva*, past action, produces a result, good or bad, after a delay so that there is an unseen (*adr̥ṣṭa*) causal relation between the act and its produced result. *Mānuṣa* is that action which brings forth its result through a seen (*dr̥ṣṭa*) instrument, and the result is immediate³⁹.

A Jain source relates that study of the *śāstras*, if done according to one's capacity and with devotion, brings forth an unexpected result (*adbhuta-phala*) in this world and in the future too⁴⁰. A householder should not get dejected even if his effort becomes apparently fruitless, or brings forth less result than expected, or even an apparently undesirable result⁴¹. It is widely held that a proper action brings forth a good result, even when not immediately recognized or when the immediate results are adverse. Sometimes the result may be delayed because of some obstacle. Therefore, observation of mere seen results may give very little information about the fruits of action, the most valued fruits being by their very nature unseen.

Not only results of action, but value-analysis of existing or future states may also refer to unseen qualities. Dhammapada says that there is no suffering like this physical existence and no happiness higher than peace of mind⁴². It appears that any analysis of the existing state of life, if sufficiently generalised, points to unseen, unempirical qualities.

Limiting value-results only to the empirical world would certainly give a distorted and erroneous idea of value. Most results that are most appreciated, and also most fatal fruits of action, are unseen. This applies also to the aims of action except the most immediate ones.

5. *Two classifications of value*

There are two well-known terms in Hindu 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. This latter classification is sometimes called *caturvarga*, "the aggregate of four values".⁴³ Actually the term *caturvarga* would appear more satisfactory in comparison with the classification of *trivarga* because *puruṣārtha* is used not only in reference to the four values but also in reference to the three values, sometimes to a single value only just as it is denoted by the term *artha*, 'good'.

These two aggregates comprehensively cover 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 Upaniṣads. But even then there has been a continuation of the *trivarga* system also as a self-sufficient system within the four-value system.

6. *What is the value of the four values?*

What then is value? It seems to be something which is found to be common in the different disciplines already mentioned. What is then the value of the four values?

Puruṣārthas are sometimes spoken of as "the ends of human life". The term *prayojana* means 'purpose' or 'aim' and also 'fruit' or 'result' of action. The term *phala* means 'fruit' or result of action⁴⁴.

These two ideas, aim and result of action, cover the Hindu discussion of values. One may object to the postulate that *mokṣa* falls outside this concept of value because for anyone who has realised the final end there is nothing at all to strive for. It may be so, but so long as *mokṣa* is unreachd it remains an end. *Mokṣa* as a realised state goes beyond values.

Besides, there are innumerable value-terms used in discussion; for instance *śreyas*, 'better' or 'welfare' and *sādhu*, 'good'. The Mīmāṃsā school of thought distinguishes *sādhya*, 'end' and *sādhana*, 'means' as technical terms. Also *saṃsāra* is a negative value-term referring to a state of bondage.

7. *Hierarchy of values*

7.1. *Naturalistic values*

The orthodox social philosophy, much more distinctly than the śramaṇic tradition, recognizes the natural urges of man. It is said that man hopes to live and gain wealth till the end of his life⁴⁵. The whole world is inclined towards *artha*⁴⁶. All men, a Mīmāṃsaka says, desire heaven, because heaven is happiness and everybody seeks happiness⁴⁷. The problem is how a factual admission that all men desire pleasure and wealth is changed into a normative claim that it is good to do so or that man ought

to do so. How does desired become desirable? Social philosophers have largely acknowledged prevailing social and psychological facts to be good and only thereafter urged new improvement.

There is a naturalistic tendency to be found also in many expressions of praise on *artha*. Kautilya holds that wealth and wealth alone is important inasmuch as *dharma* and *kāma* depend upon wealth as an instrument⁴⁸. *Dhana*, wealth, is said to be the highest goal for action, for everything is based on *dhana*. In this world rich people live and poor ones are dead while alive⁴⁹. *Dharma* and *kāma* are parts of *artha* because they are attained by the perfection of *artha*⁵⁰. The purported meaning seems to be that an instrument includes its end. Sometimes the householder's stage is extolled as the highest because all the other stages of life depend on this one, just as all breathing beings depend on air.⁵¹ *Artha* is thus held to be a necessary instrument to *kāma* and *dharma*.

The general advice is that wealth should be utilised preferably for *dharma* and not for *kāma*⁵². In case it is not possible to practise all three values, learned people choose *dharma* and *artha*⁵³. Hierarchically *kāma* is admitted to be the lowest value; even then we may say that it is a necessary vehicle for higher values. *Mokṣa* cannot be pursued without the desire for *mokṣa*. We may hence ask, is the end hierarchically more important than its necessary instrument? Is *mokṣa* higher than *mokṣa-kāma*, although the latter is the prerequisite of the former? Because every conceivable value has instrumental value, the problem cannot be solved merely by pointing out the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values.

7.2. Cultural values

Often *dharma* is praised, and very much so. He who performs dharmic actions earns great fame and shines like a sun, but he who neglects *dharma* suffers in spite of having acquired property⁵⁴. Everybody desires happiness, happiness is produced by *dharma*, therefore *dharma* should be carefully and constantly practised by all people⁵⁵.

Naturalistic desire is here on its face-value given as a fact. The purported meaning is that happiness is good; however, the normative qualification is expressly entered into the moral inference by demanding the proper instrument which leads to fulfilment of the desire. The

normative emphasis is on the instrument and not on the end.

The supremacy of *dharmā* is also implied by the following statement: non-cruelty (*ānṛṣamsya*) is considered higher than *artha* and *kāma*⁵⁶. Non-cruelty towards all living beings is the highest *dharmā*⁵⁷. *Dharma* is higher than the other *trivarga* values and among the elements of *dharmā* moral value is the highest.

Even more so, in *pravṛtti dharmā* there is a hierarchical distinction. *Iṣṭa* and *pūrta* are common means of *dharmā* for the higher castes but a *śūdra* is entitled only to perform the latter⁵⁸. *Iṣṭa* includes offerings to the fire and a group of gods, austerities, study of the Vedas, and hospitality. *Pūrta*, which obviously has lower value, includes social actions like digging a well, provision for a public garden, constructing temples and offering food.

The hierarchical distinction of values is also expressed in the form of a negative criticism of the naturalistic values. *Artha* and *kāma* are said to be the root of defects and are obstructions to the knowledge of reality⁵⁹. Another Sanskrit drama describes that a righteous man of pure heart is not attracted by wealth⁶⁰. But he who has abandoned *trivarga* experiences happiness in this life and attains the state of the noble ones⁶¹. Of all actions consisting of sacrifices, moral behaviour and study of the Vedas, the highest *dharmā* is to realise the *ātman* by the means of yoga⁶². *Dharma* which leads to *mokṣa* is the highest⁶³.

We may generalise and say that the naturalistic values *kāma* and *artha*, being based on the actual desires of man, stand lowest in the hierarchy. But cultural values which are more difficult to attain stand superior. They need effort, the greater the mental effort the higher they are. The naturalistic values do not need any emphasis, men pursue them anyway. But cultural values need pedagogic motivation and this may be a reason for giving them a higher status.

Another problem is the stress on the instrumental value. An instrument is useful for attaining the end. It is said that *phala-icchā*, desire for a fruit, causes *upāya-icchā*, desire for an instrument to reach that result. Sometimes, the instrument is stressed as a necessity and as the most important⁶⁴.

The famous statement of the *Gītā* that your right is to action only, but never to the fruit thereof⁶⁵, may be seen as an emphasis on a necessary

instrument which when fulfilled takes, in matter of due course, care of the end. This resembles the 'hedonistic paradox': if you hanker after pleasure, you never reach it. But if you take care of other values, obviously instrumental ones, you gain happiness. In a situation of choice, in this sense, the necessary instrument has higher value than the end to be achieved thereby.

7.3. *The growth of values*

The question of the hierarchy of values is different within the framework of *trivarga* and *caturvarga* systems. According to the former *kāma* is the most essential because without desire no value can be generated. Without *kāma* there could not be any other value either. However, *artha* is an important means to *kāma* and safeguards its continuation. But *dharma*, again, is the controlling principle, it limits and qualifies the pursuit of the naturalistic values; accordingly the controlling principle may be considered of higher value than what is under its control. We may hence propose a question: is *kāma* the highest, being the most essential, or is *artha* the highest being of most use in safeguarding *kāma*, or is *dharma* superior as the controlling principle?

In the four-value system the problem of hierarchy is different from that of *trivarga*. The whole aggregate of three values becomes an instrument for a higher aim of life. If the three values are followed properly they lead to the highest good⁶⁶. Accordingly the Ultimate as a formal principle has the highest value.

Values are related to personal qualities (*guṇa*) in the following way: out of *trivarga* a wise man chooses *dharma*, an average man chooses *artha* which is a cause of fighting, and only a dolt chooses *kāma* alone⁶⁷. Learned people say that *dharma* is the best quality, *artha* is the middle and *kāma* the lowest quality⁶⁸. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* should be practised equally. A person following only one of them is the lowest of man. One following only two of them is an average man, and one practising all the three is the highest type of person⁶⁹. The above references reflect the common typology of the three *guṇas*: a *sāttvic* or wise man practises *dharma*, a *rājasic* or active man *artha* and a *tāmasic* or deluded man practises, without any mental effort, merely *kāma*.

A particular hierarchy is purported in the lines laid down by the Upaniṣads when they distinguish between three worlds. This world of living men is won by having a son, the world of the forefathers through prescribed action and the world of gods through meditation. The world attainable through meditation is the best of the three worlds⁷⁰.

'Seen' and 'unseen' fruits of action have different hierarchical values. The first wife is called *dharmā-patnī*, wife helpful in the performance of *dharmā*, but the second one is only to increase sexual desire. The result of the second marriage is then merely *dr̥ṣṭa* 'seen' and not *adr̥ṣṭa* 'unseen'⁷¹.

People are to be respected for their knowledge, activity, age, relations and wealth, in descending order. Even a *śūdra* having these qualities deserves respect in old age⁷². According to a Mīmāṃsaka view action performed without knowing its real nature destroys the performer. But action performed with knowledge leads to the highest good⁷³. Thus whatever is gained by adequate knowledge is superior to that which is gained without knowledge.

Indian values, within the orthodox Hindu system, most clearly provide something for everyone. From *kāma* to the highest level of mental concentration a progressive series of values is presented to give man a clear and tangible guidance so that he may according to his means and status strive for fulfilment. The śramanic tradition distinctly emphasises mental growth in attaining spiritual values on a higher level of consciousness, spontaneous moral awakening and self-determination.

Notes and references

- 1) Manusmṛti 17.26.
- 2) Mahābhārata Ādiparva 1.16.
- 3) Mahābhārata Śāntiparva 167. 2.
- 4) Manusmṛti 2. 100.
- 5) Rāmāyaṇa 2. 58. 20.
- 6) Bhāgavatapurāṇa 11. 23. 24.
- 7) Sāgaradharmāmṛta 8. 32. (Jain)
- 8) Vasiṣṭhasmṛti 19. 1.
- 9) Carakasamhitā 1. 8. 33.
- 10) Ṛgveda 1. 114. 7-8.
- 11) Ṛgveda 2. 23. 16.
- 12) Ṛgveda 1. 18. 3.
- 13) Ṛgveda 1. 2. 9; 2. 23. 17.

- 14) Ṛgveda 1. 93. 7; 1. 90. 3; 1. 25. 19; 7. 16. 8; 1. 143. 8.
- 15) Ṛgveda 1. 43. 2; 1. 48. 1; 1. 157. 2; 7. 16. 10.
- 16) Atharvaveda 6. 58. 3; 7. 14. 4; Ṛgveda 8. 48. 4; 7. 16. 4; 8. 59. 7; 1. 1. 3; 1. 125. 1.
- 17) Atharvaveda 19. 67. 1 and 19. 67. 6.
- 18) Ṛgveda 1. 116. 25.
- 19) Ṛgveda 7. 82. 7; 1. 24. 14; 1. 18. 5.
- 20) Ṛgveda 1. 152. 3; 8. 59. 6.
- 21) Ṛgveda 1. 72. 9; 1. 24. 9.
- 22) Bhāgavatapurāṇa 4. 18. 26.
- 23) Parāśarasamṛti 7. 41. Also Viṣṇupurāṇa 1. 6. 10.
- 24) Cāṇakyaśūtra 567.
- 25) Suśrutasaṃhitā 1. 1. 3.
- 26) Carakasaṃhitā 1. 1. 15-16.
- 27) Ibid. 1. 1. 6; 1. 16. 38.
- 28) Kāmandakīya Nītisāra 2. 17.
- 29) S. Ch. Chatterjee, *The Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*, Calcutta 1939, pp. 1-2.
- 30) Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, completed and edited by Joseph Campbell (Bollingen Series, 26) New York 1951, pp. 56-57.
- 31) Śukranīti 1. 67. Also Kāmandakīya Nītisāra 1. 13.
- 32) Cāṇakyaśūtra 1. 3.
- 33) Dakṣasmṛti, p. 579.
- 34) Bhāgavatapurāṇa 4. 8. 41.
- 35) Ṛgveda 10. 71. 3.
- 36) Mahābhārata, Vanaparva 313. 117.
- 37) Ibid. 33. 30 (*Vāṛṣ* to see).
- 38) Śābarabhāṣya 4. 3. 20-27.
- 39) Arthaśāstra 97. 2. 6-7.
- 40) Śāgaradharmāmṛta 8. 78.
- 41) Ibid. 6. 16.
- 42) Dhammapada 202.
- 43) Hemacandra's Yogaśāstra 1. 15 and Kālidāsa's Raghuvamśa 10. 22.
- 44) 'Action' includes here not merely bodily but also mental action and the use of senses.
- 45) Vāyupurāṇa 93. 100.
- 46) Cāṇakyaśūtra 502.
- 47) Śābarabhāṣya 4. 3. 15.
- 48) Arthaśāstra 3. 6. 4.
- 49) Mahābhārata, Udyogaparva 72. 23.
- 50) Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva 167. 14.
- 51) Manusmṛti 3. 77.
- 52) Viṣṇupurāṇa 2. 14. 17.
- 53) Mahābhārata, Udyogaparva 124. 34.
- 54) Ibid. 27. 6.
- 55) Dakṣasmṛti, p. 578. Should be practised: *kārya*.
- 56) Mahābhārata, Vanaparva 313. 133.
- 57) Kāmandakīya Nītisāra 3. 6.
- 58) Atrismṛti 46.
- 59) Kirāta 11. 20.
- 60) Mṛcchakaṭika 8. 32.
- 61) Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva 191. 17.
- 62) Yājñavalkyasmṛti 1. 8.
- 63) Vāyupurāṇa 73. 67.
- 64) Muktāvalī 150.

- 65) Bhagavadgītā 2. 47.
- 66) Carakasamhitā 1. 12. 13.
- 67) Mahābhārata, Udyogaparva 124. 35.
- 68) Mahābhārata, Śāntiparva 167. 8.
- 69) Ibid. 167. 40.
- 70) Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 1. 5. 16. *Vidyā* = *upāsana*, meditation, devotion.
- 71) Dakṣasmṛti, p. 581.
- 72) Yājñavalkyasmṛti 1. 116.
- 73) Bṛhatī 1. 1. 1.