


THE UPANIṢADIC SPECTRUM OF CONTEXTUAL VALUES-THE THREE 'S'PERPLEXES

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Abstract

Values are the products of social conditioning. 'Value' or 'iṣṭa' is 'that which is desired'. Values are derived from people, society, culture, and environment as well as one's transcendental experiences. The modern egalitarian society is characterized by the trauma of the three S's – Selfishness, Self-love and Self-interest. These three are normally thought of as flagrant contradictions to values. But the Upaniṣadic theory is that 'we are not our own but belong to God and hence forget ourselves that all things are ours'. This brings in the best values for human beings. Man is nothingness in absolute. This indicates that there is nothing in us to be desired and respected. So the three 'S's are commonly acclaimed as greatest sins but not values. Not to be selfish implies not to do what one wishes and to give up one's own wishes for the sake of others¹. But in principle the affirmation of one's own life, happiness, growth and freedom is rooted in his capacity to love others. If an individual is able to love productively he loves himself as well as others. Selfishness, then cannot be a sin. Self-interest means the preservation of one's existence in the sense that he realizes his own potentialities. But the implications of it fetch towards the virtue one could possess because he strives to keep his 'profit'. However the implied meanings behind



self-interest have changed over years. In the early periods of human history, man regarded himself as an intrinsic part in the form of individual in a group. Now the term self refers to the property one possesses. The concept of self is not 'I am what I think' but 'I am what I have' or 'what I possess'. This attitude is because of the fact that by the creation of various sources of mechanical energy, man has to afford to a minimal consumption of his own energy. Here lies the exact cause of social disintegration. Organization of the society with all its ingredients entails the pertinent accumulation of energy through bio-means. This can be achieved only when self-love, self-interest and selfishness are received in the new contextual sense. The seeds of such an ever-relevant ideology regarding human social setup can be well found in the creations of the great Vedic seers in the form of the Upaniṣads.

Introduction

Modern culture represents a talk on illusory human values. A preference for selfish end in its relative and relational implications has delivered these apparently deceptive values. The three most classic expressions of this flagrant contradiction to the concept of values are-selfishness, self-interest and self-love. It is commonly taught that 'to be selfish is a sinful act and to love others is a virtue'. Self-interest does not permit an individual to contribute to the welfare of others in the society whereby any kind of improvement in social environment from his part remains blocked. Self-love also implies the same as self-interest but it refers to one's desire for eternity in peculiar contexts. The present society representing the whole universe witnesses the hazardous consequences of the improper application of these three 'S's. I wish to present here the contextual necessities wherein the earnest good/ought of the social conditioning can be approached

through the three S's and examine the necessary conditions for value-judgments in the context of upanisadic spectre.

The act of social conditioning represents values as the core of human development. The extreme claims of contextual confectures on the thesis of the three 'S's as evil are refuted in the upanisads. Values, in the right context, are the products of 'social conditioning' that involves interactions among people, society, and environment and to the ultimate- spirituality. Apparently values deal with varied social, moral, educational, religious and ethical issues. The fact is that such values can never be claimed for certainty in their findings. Value is valuation or liking and avoidance of disliking anything that involves achievement of one's goals. It is satisfaction of desire or achievement of ends through the knowledge of true facts. It is called 'iṣṭa' – the object of liking in Sanskrit. In this sense value is that which is desired. Valuation is a dynamic quality of man and through preference and aversion; he utilizes this for his development.

Values are derived from people, society, culture and environment as well as transcendental experience. Value remains a contextual and relational concept, for nothing wholly independent can have value and again values vary with situations. Values by virtue of its relational and contextual nature can be assessed based on the three S' s:

1. Self-love : Preferences and aversions for our choices.
2. Self-interest : Interest fulfillments of an individual for the sake of others.
- 3 .Selfishness : concern over ones own aspirations.

Preferences vary from person to person and society to society. These are based on one's ideals and beliefs. Perfection is the ultimate

end of this ideal and it is taught as the virtue. But this is not easy to achieve in practical life. It is the logical and rational thinking of an individual that increases one's value. We are born and live here because of our associational karmas (past impressions). Only when these impressions of karma are subsumed the life can return to its destination – the Being. This is why man becomes evil or good when the intrinsic value components are overpowered/ subdued within the past impressions of karma. The three main determinants of evil that require a deeper introspection are Self-love, Self-Interest and Selfishness.

The Upaniṣadic theory is that we are not our own but of god-the Supreme Being. We have some intrinsic components that govern our value according to our karmas or impressions. This expresses the fact that man is powerless and is essentially evil because of the three 'S's'. We can achieve absolutely nothing that is good without this intrinsic component. So the upaniṣads tell us to forget ourselves (body) and that entire which is claimed as ours (self-love). Again, we are God's own and therefore we have to live and achieve the Supreme. One should have the conviction of his absolute nothingness and hence should work for others. One should not think of oneself as he may be supposed to be influenced by his excellence. Such a theory will be an unfeigned submission of a mind overwhelmed with self-love that turns to be evil. The emphasis here would be on the nothingness and wickedness of man that signifies the fact that there is nothing one should like and respect about him (Jīvanmukta state)². This is self-contempt and self-hatred. Hence as Johannes Calvin calls, 'self-love is a pest'. Accordingly, if an individual finds something 'on the strength of which he experiences pleasure in himself' that is betrayed of self-love; for attachment to himself will make him sit in

valuating others only. Hence to be in self-love is one of the greatest sins. This self-love does not include love for others and is identical with selfishness.

The idea that man is an end in himself and not only a means condemns self-love. The real virtue lies in happiness of others. Longing for one's own happiness is something that man naturally strives for. But such a natural striving has no positive value. It is right to say that one must not give up one's claim for happiness because health, wealth and the like are essential for fulfillment of one's duty. But self-love can never be considered as a virtue. An individual should find extreme happiness in the fulfillment of duty towards others. Though love for others may seem as weakness or self-sacrifice, good nature, gentleness and the like are the products of love. Love involves sacrifice alone and demands self-sacrifice. True kindness, nobility and greatness of the soul are the essential cruxes of the values. This is because love is a phenomenon of wastages of heart, its premise being the strength of the individual. To love another person depends on the inner strength that does not express one's self-motive.

Selfishness is generally considered as evil. Each of the ancient literature pronounces 'don't be selfish'. Not to be selfish means not to act according to ones wishes or to denounce ones wishes for the sake of others. Does it not mean that 'don't love you' but submit to others wishes? This will certainly suppress the free development of one's personality. But selfishness has another contextual mode. By becoming selfish, one should keep one's advantages as virtues in mind and act according to what is best for oneself. This also means that a person acting in such a selfish mood will also act in the same way towards others. In a basic psychological premise we ourselves

are not different from others. Hence attitudes and feelings towards others are conjunctive to ours. The implication is that an attitude of love towards oneself will be found in all those who love others. Love cannot be distinguished for others as well as for oneself. Genuine love is an expression of respect, responsibility and knowledge. It directs one towards the growth and happiness of others and is routed in the person who loves others. It is significant that romantic love is not true love as it is only an attachment. The same is the case with attachment with the family. Therefore, it can be said that in principle, love that affirms one's life, happiness and growth is routed in 'capacity to love'.

Selfishness always does not have concern for others. The person inflicted with selfishness is interested in himself, wants every thing for himself is not satisfied with giving but with receiving. He thinks that the external world is for him only and needs of others are not genuine. He does not respect others and their integrity. So he fails to love others. But this makes him feel loneliness and thereby he may be under the submission of frustration and hatred. He is more anxious to care too much for his satisfaction. He could never understand that this will make his failure to care for his self. In this way a selfish person can neither love others nor even himself.

Self-interest is the third concept that is the most prevalent in modern society. Self-interest in general implies 'interest for striving for one's own benefit or preserve his being'. The more one possesses self interest, the more virtuous he will be. This is so because each man has to preserve his existence by realizing his inner inherent potentialities as a human being. One has to acquire the knowledge of one's own self and its interests so that these can be served in a

better way. In the same way one has to know the real needs of others to love them. So the knowledge of the self forms the basis of man's self-interest.

Self-interest when used in the narrow context of selfishness (interest in material satisfaction), power and success becomes vice rather than virtue. This is what is really experienced in the new world order. The new definition is that self-interest is nothing but that which is felt by a person, not his real nature. The religious formulations prefer the submission to the self-interest, a self-interest that is guided and directed by a supreme being. It is because of this will of the being that man has become an instrument of this and hence one should suppress his self-interest.

The changing connotation of the self-interest has made man an instrument for satisfying his financial fatigue, not of the will of the being. Instead of enjoyment in life, he has accumulated wealth for his own success. Personal happiness and enjoyment are not the real aims of life. It is living by self-denial and self-interest of a peculiar kind aiming at economic benefit and success. Personal happiness and enjoyment are not the real aims of life. It is living by self-denial and self-interest of a peculiar kind aiming at economic benefit and success. This makes his inner potentialities active and his values decreased to an irrecoverable end. The meaning of 'value' had narrowed down to the level of mere selfishness. Then it is 'I am what I have/ possess'; and not 'I am what I think' as clarified by William James. My own body and its needs have preponderance over the real self-interest that implies the egoistic interest. Even the above concept had undergone a dramatic change in its meaning as 'I am as you desire me'. Man's value is determined by the market economy. He is interested in himself in his success as the seller and the buyer in

the market. His self-interest is interest of himself as the guide of the material market notwithstanding his personality. Ultimately, at the downfall, he will recognize his fallacy that he had deceived his real self-interest. By that, he had lost his valuable time and at the end, he will become the raw material for the next life cycle. Therefore, one has to understand that neither possession of wealth of the world nor the power nor success would save his soul from degeneration. Self-interest should focus on the welfare of the soul and its wholeness as a prerequisite for value development. Perhaps the most in the downgrading of human values is not the too much concern for self-interest (material factors) but the non-interest in the real self, not in the fact that man is too much selfish but that he has no self-love. The feeling of severe insecurity has made man to reconsider his faith option for a submission to the Supreme Being. But even this faith option that puts forth success and happiness has spelled the doom of futility and doubt because of the selfishness associated with the slogans of self-interest. However the fertile condition of all progress can blossom only when man himself thinks about his best self-interest as a human being. More and more disillusionment will pave the way for a revaluation of self-interest that can canalize all human energy to work towards the success and thereby the attainment of the Supreme Brahman as disclosed in the Upaniṣads. The principle is that only if there is disillusionment and dissatisfaction, will there be a psychological and social change- a rational insight, a change in the meaning of self-interest. Once man knows his real self-interest, it is the first step to self-realization.

Now, to try to account for the dynamic nature of human values, it can be well explained that humans by virtue of having the capacity of rational thinking, have the ability to sense what is

good or bad, right or wrong. In this context, only human beings have intrinsic value while all others have only an instrumental value or user value in the sense that these can be used to satisfy human needs according to their will. Values are worthwhile only when they are concerned with the welfare of all and less perilous to the environment man belongs. A qualitative development of man comes only when there is better control of his self (3 Ss) as well as his environment for an independent, interdependent, richer and harmonious living expressed in the form of values. Real development comes only when there is confidence, courage and conscience in people about the mankind and its environment. Then he will preserve his self-dignity, self-pride and self-respect, the components of values. Religion as the foster of spirituality is concerned with such values and its core principle lies in teaching unconditioned love towards other beings without any discrimination. In this sense, values become dharma or code of conduct that helps all to perform their duties with honesty and sincerity and self-love. Again, when selfishness overpowers desire/ liking in the sense of value (iṣṭa), it becomes lust (dviṣṭa) disliking. One cannot expect complete perfection in all beings but a balanced one will be good for the individual, the society and the environment. The Upaniṣadic term kāma suits more for values as it has several antagonistic implications.

Kāma= desire for objects, desire for liberation; Love for individual, love for others; will for success such as dignity, pride, self-respect etc.; will for power of submission. However, the ultimate value lies in the maximum extent of perfection of the being that brings in all the contextual implications of values as realistic and worthwhile.

While looking for this twofold antagonism of values, the basic factor behind this is nothing but the egoism in man. Egoism also has a dual representation- a positive one that allows realizing the ultimate value while the negative counterpart brings in annihilation. Thus self-love, self-interest and selfishness may be considered as a manifestation of the two extremes of egoism (the 'I' derecognizing 'you' is negative). The mode of sensitivity given for engagement with desire leads either to a healthy positive value or to detrimental negative emotional tendencies.

It is the cognitive demand in us that impels us towards the positive polarity. There are certain limitations imposed by what is termed *prārabdha karma* that pulls back one's effort to develop positive polarity. But it is possible to restrain these limitations if one is prepared to change his static perspective on others as well as himself through concerted efforts of control of mental functions. The individual must be motivated to this state by means of values in a positive manner. It is important to realize and recognize the real content of values and the individual must find a readiness to accept these. It is the idea of perfection and ideal state that is unfolded creatively by the Upaniṣads. It is desirelessness that should be the goal of each being; not desire of material fullness.

True values can be identified through the five components in 'WATCH':

W - Word,

A - Action,

T - Thought,

C- Cconduct,

H - Heart.

Among these, word denotes selfishness, action indicates self-interest and all others represent self-love.

References :

1. Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad 4.5.6.
2. Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.12.1

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