IS THERE A MORAL PERSPECTIVE IN PATAÑJALI'S YOGASUTRAS ? *

(I) What is a moral perspective?

The two sorts of questions need to be distinguished at the very outset.

- (i) Is there any systematic discipline called Indian moral philosophy? (A general question.) Does Yoga-system(for instance) have a moral theory? (A more specific question).
- (ii) Are there moral perspectives (approaches, view-points) traceable in Indian philosophical literature? (Ageneral question). Does Patañjali, the author of Yogasūtras present a moral perspective? (A specific question)

It is possible to answer the questions of the sort (i) in nagative and those of sort (ii) in affirmative, But it is not possible to answer them conversely. Construction of the so-called Indian moral philosophy i.e., construction of moral philosophy or philosophies(or rather moral philosophical theories) based on ancient Indian ideas and ideologies, is a task that perhaps we ourselves should undertake; but for this we need not deny the possibility of there already being one or many moral perspectives implicit or explicit in the ancient Indian philosophical literature.

Before directly dealing with the moral perspective of this or that philosophical system or this or that ancient Indian thinker, it is necessary to consider the question as to what we understand by a moral perspective. Answer to this question is necessary in the context of moral philosophy in general and the so-called 'Indian Moral Philosophy' in particular.

We can significantly ask with reference to a philosophical system S or an author A, for instance, "What is the moral perspective in S, if it contains any"? or "What is moral perspective, if he has any?"

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Though significant, the questions are ambiguous because the expression' moral perspective' in them assumes more than one meaning. Let us consider two senses, one broad and the other narrow, which, I think, are important.

- (I) Moral perspective could mean a perspective (an approach, a view-point) concerning issues such as "Which course of actions is good for man? What are the ends or goals that a person ought to try to achieve? What are the proper (right) means to those ends or goals?". Here we are using the terms such as ought, proper, right, good etc. without demarcating clearly between social, moral (in a restricted sense), legal and religious obligations or norms. According to this broad understanding of ought, good etc. and, therefore, that of moral perspective, any normative approach, whether the norms involved are moral or social or religious in character, will be called a moral perspective. A moral perspective in this broad sense need not be concerned with universal or universalisable obligations and values alone, but could itself be a partial and discriminatory approach or a purely relativistic approach with regard to basic obligations and values. A moral perspective in this broad sense could even be immoral in a narrower sense. In this broad sense, I suppose every system of Indian philosophy can be said to contain some moral perspective or the other. But we need not confine ourselves to the consideration of moral perspectives in this broad sense when we are asking questions such as 'What is the moral perspective in S if S contains any or 'what is A' s moral perspective, if A has any'. Given that S contains a moral perspective in this broad sense, we can, legitimately ask whether the system also contains a moral perspective in a narrower sense. A narrower sense of the expression 'moral perspective' can be stated as below.
- (II) I think that there is a restricted sense of 'moral' in which we are justified in saying that basic moral obligations and norms are not supposed to change from person to person, from community to community, from religion to religion or from culture to culture. The obligations and norms which are central to a moral perspective in this sense are supposed to be applicable to all human beings equally. They do not apply to a human being because he has certain distinguishing characteristics or because he belongs to a particular community or a particular culture, but they apply to him because and insofar as he is a human being like any other human being. This is a sense in which we can distinguish between moral values on the one hand and other cultural, religious and legal norms on the other. In this sense morality is universal and not specific to one's cultural, religious or political identity. To use the distinction current in the normative discourse of ancient Indian origin, we can say that a moral perspective in the restricted sense is one in which sādhāraṇadharmas have a central

place or priority as against visesadharmas. On the contrary a perspective in which visesadharmas are central or prior as against sādhārandharmas is not a moral perspective, though it may be a cultural or religious or political perspective, depending upon the nature of visesadharmas predominant in it. A religious or a political perspective could even turn out to be 'immoral' insofar as it allows the violation of sādhāranadharmas as against visesadharmas.¹

We should be concerned with this sense of a moral perspective, basically, when we take up the task of reconstructing or reformulating a moral philosophy of Indian origin. It is by employing this notion of a moral perspective that we will be able to avoid the odd situation of discussing any kind of normative perspective (whether moral, amoral or immoral) in the name of moral perspective. It is through this that we will be able to identify the problems in Indian moral philosophy which could be most relevant to western moral philosophy and also to bring the moral philosophies of eastern and western origin comparably closer to each other.

Let me mention some such problems which can be raised with reference to a given moral perspective of Indian origin.

- (i) Given that some universalistic values, which may be termed as sādhāranadharms, sīla, yama or vrata, are central in a particular moral prespective the question can arise: what is the sense and what is the way in which these values are centered in that perspective? Are they central because they are intrinsically valuable? Or are they central inspite of their being means to some goals? To put it differently, is the given perspective teleological (purpose oriented or goal oriented) or deonotological (intrinsic-duty-oriented)?
- (ii) If the given perspective is goal-oriented, what is the goal of morality according to that perspective? Is the goal egoistic or universalistic? If it is egoistic, is it morally defensible? If so, in what way? What, for instance, is the conception of liberation(kaivalya, mokṣa, nibbāṇa etc.) as the goal of morality according to the given perspective? In what sense can liberation be understood as a moral goal, if at all it can be so understood?
- (iii) It is possible that the given moral perspective is an aspect of a complex philosophical system which contains many other non-moral view-points as its aspects. How are these different view-points connected together in the given system? Do they conhere or conflict with each other?

(iv) One may go still futher and try to compare and correlate the moral perspective of the given system with the moral (or even nonmoral) perspectives of other systems, and try to see which one is stronger or weaker than the others and in which respects it is so.

In the light of the above problems. I suppose, it is possible to understand and evaluate the moral perspectives inherent in the respective systems of Indian philosophy. I would like to do such an exercise with respect to the Yoga-system of Patanjali. But before I can do that. I have to address myself to the question whether the Yoga-system of Patanjali can be said to contain a moral perspective in the restricted sense explicated above. Because, as I have suggested above, alothough every system of Indian philosophy does seem to contain a moral perspective in broad sense, it can legitimately be asked with reference to every system, whether it contains a moral perspective in a narrower sense as well. I would like to discuss this question with reference to Yoga in the next part.

(II) Moral goal, spiritual goal and ethical egoism:

At the very outset, it may be noted that the Yoga system of Patanjali has a goal-oriented view of ideal life; it recommends the ultimate goal as kaivalya and the penultimate goal as samādhī to human beings. So, the general perspective of Yoga, whether it is moral in the restricted sense or not, is a goal-oriented perspective. So, while inquiring into the moral status of the goal recommended by it. I will discuss this question in the section, A of this part of the paper. In the remaining sections (i.e. B, C and D) I would like to discuss the question whether Yoga can be said to have a moral perspective, with special reference to Prof. V.K. Bharadvaja's argument which answers this question in the negative.

(A) Is the goal of life recommended by Yoga, a moral goal?

As I have already suggested, the goal of life as recommended by Patanjali in his Yogasūtras is a goal having two stages. The ultimate stage is Kaivalya, whereas the penultimate stage is samādhī. Kaivalya is basically a metaphysical state. Strictly speaking it is not a human state. Kaivalya either means the original form of prakṛtī to which it is reduced through the process of reverse generation(prati-prasava)² or it means the pure consciouseness (the Yoga analogue of the puruṣa of Sānkhya) restored to its original nature.³ But it is not the state of human being qua human being. Because the humanhood of a human being is supposed to consist in a particular combination of the object and the subject or the prakṛtī and the puruṣa respectively. In the state of

kaivalya this combination is supposed to be totally disintegrated and destroyed. Therefore, although kaivalya is the goal recommended to human beings, it is not a human state as such. Because kaivalya is not a human state it also cannot be called a moral state. Now, if by a 'moral goal' we mean a goal which is justly prescribed to a moral agent and achieving which also retains the status of the moral agent as a moral agent, then kaivalya cannot be a moral goal.

From kaivalva we come down to samadhi which is supposed to be the penultimate goal. In fact, although kaivalya was supposed to be the ultimate goal, the central or chief concern of Pataniali in his Yogasūtras remained samādhī, which is the same thing for him as Yoga. 4 Samādhī was classified by Patanjali into sabīja and nirbīja and also into samprainata and asamprainata. Although the two classifications do not seem to boil down to the same, the distinction between the two classifications need not concern us here. In any case nirbiia samadhi is the last step in the eight-fold yoga which a Yogin is supposed to try to achieve. Nirbija samādhī stands for a stable and peaceful state of mind (citta), in which the mind does not undergo any modification (vrtti). In this state one is supposed to have realised clearly the minute distinction between the power of apprehension (buddhi) (which is a manifestation of prakrti, on the one hand, and the purely conscious being namely purusa on the other. The possibility of the confusion between them which was the cause of suffering is now supposed to have ceased for ever. Nirbija samādhī, therefore, signifies a human state in which one has reached the complete cessation of suffering. But the question remains whether it is the state of a moral agent. A human being in the state of nirbija samadhi has realised that he as a person was a combination of active existence (of the intellect. physical body etc.) and the passive awareness(of purusa) which cannot in fact be attributed to the same thing. A moral agent, on the other hand, should have the awareness or belief on his part that he is a unity capable of acting consciously. A human being who lacks an awareness or belief of this kind cannot be regarded as a moral agent. Thus, the state of nirbija samādhī, strictly speaking, cannot be said to be the state of a moral agent.

But if we come to a still lower stage and consider the state of sabīja samādhī, then perhaps we can identify this state as a state of a moral agent, because it is perfectly possible for a person in that state to posses an awareness or a belief that he is an active conscious being 5 Thus, sabīja samādhī can be provisionally treated as a moral goal because the achievement of this goal is not only the result of one's moral pursuit but it also preserves one's identity as a moral agent.

The above discussion reveals that although sabtja samādhī could be conceived as a moral goal in an important sense of the term, the 'higher' goals recommended by Patanjali viz: nirbīja samādhī and kaivalya cannot be conceived as moral goals in the same sense. The latter goals, however, could be called spiritual goals, Here, by spiritual goal. I understand the goal the achievement of which marks one's identity as a spirit or a soul, as a conscious being that can exist without body. A moral goal, on the other hand, has been understood as a goal the achievement of which marks one's identity as a moral agent. The two kinds of goal, though may not be necessarily inconsistent with each other, are yet conceptually irreducible to each other. That is to say although it is possible in principle that one and the same goal is pursued both as a moral goal and as a spiritual goal, it need not necessariy be so pursued. A spiritual goal is a moral goal only if its achievement by a person preserved his status as a moral agent. And a moral goal is also a spiritual goal only if its achievement preserves one's status as a spirit or a soul which can exist independently of body. Thus sabīja samādhī may be moral as well as a spiritual goal, but nirbīja samādhī and kaivalya are only spiritual goals, and not moral goals.

In the light of the above considerations we can say that Patanjali's system of *Yoga* is primarily and ultimately concerned with spirituality, but it could be concerned with morality only in a secondary way. The moral perspective is in this sense subordinated to the spiritual perspetive in this system.

(B) Is Patańjali's Yoga ethical? Prof. Bharadwaja's argument.

But Prof. V.K. Bharawaja does not seem to be ready to attribute the moral perspective to Patanjali's Yoga even in a secondary way. In this article "A Non-ethical Concept of Ahimsā" he tries to show that the concept of ahimsā as found in Patanjali's aṣṭānga-yoga is not ethical. His argument is important because, if it is sound, it can be extended to other so-called ethical principles expressed in Yogasūtras and will imply that Patanjali's Yoga is not ethical.

The main steps in Prof. Bharadwaja's argument are as follows:

- i) The only property of *ahimsā* conduct which makes it ethical is that it seeks the good of every body. And its corollary: In no case is the *ahimsā*-conduct moral, if it is aimed at the good of the individual himself. For then the action would be called selfish and not moral.
- (ii) Ahimsā is a necessary part of yoganganuşthāna (i.e. undertaking the eight-fold path of yoga) But this yoganganuşthāna is aimed at

three aims in progressive process (a) purification of mind (asuddhiksaya); (b) continuing illumination of self-knowledge (jñānadipti); (c) the perceptive understanding of reality (vivekakhyāti). This progressive process is supposed to culimnate into kaivalya (aloneness of purusa).

(iii) But all these aims, stated above, are supposed to qualify the moral agent himself and they are not concerned with social good. In other words, the aim of *ahimsā* is supposed to be the individual good and no either social or moral good.

Prof. Bharadwaja concludes from these steps that ahimsā of Yoga is not an ethical concept.

Prof. Bharadwaja proposes another argument in his support. It could be summarised as follows:

- (i) In the moral realm, normal human actions alone are evaluated, not the natural events involving causality. A moral judgement is based always upon considerations of responsibility and not of causality.
- (ii) In the system of Yoga, undertaking the eight fold path of Yoga, of which ahimsā is an important aspect, is described as a cause (and that too not a material cause) of ašuddhiksaya, jnānadiptī etc. In the case of the yogin, therefore, the notion of responsibility has no place in his scheme of things.

Prof. Bharadwaja concludes: "In such a state of affairs, then, there is no moral judgement, no responsibility but causality only".

Let me try to connect Prof. Bharadwaja's argument with mine. I have suggested that sabīja samādhi could be regarded as a moral goal in an important sense, because in that state the person is still a moral agent. Prof. Bharadwaja goes a step further and suggests that even this sabīja-samādhī cannot be regarded as a moral goal because it is egoistic in nature. Sabījasamādhī and all the higher stages such as asuddhikṣaya. jnānadiptī, vivekakhyātī, nirbīja-samādhī and kaivalya are purely individual achievements and they are in no way concerned with universal good. Now, if yamas in general and ahimsā in particular is prescribad to a yogin because it is instrumental to this egoistic goal, then it cannot be regarded as a form of moral conduct. Consequently, the Yoga. point of view, as exhibited in the prescription of yamas⁷ cannot be regarded as a moral point of view.

This, I think, is the main argument of Prof. Bharadwaja. The second in terms of causality and responsibility, I think, is not as strong

as the first one. Let me however begin with the second argument and then turn to the first one.

(C) A response to Prof. Bharadwaja's argument:

Prof Bharadwaja contends that since ahimsa is described as a link in the causal chain which has kaivalya as its end-point, we get causality of ahimsā, but ahimsā does not get connected with 'responsibility' which is central to a moral point of view. The objection can be answered, I think, as follows:

Prof. Bharadwaja's objection is based on the wrong conception that responsibility and causality are inconsistent with each other. It is true that responsibility implies freedom of will. But does freedom of will contradict with causality? Many philosophers, notably G.E. Moore in his Ethics, point out that freedom of will and causal determinism can go together. That they can go together has to be in fact a presupposition of any teleological ethics because it has to contain the notions of freedom and responsibility, on the one hand, and the notion of goodness or rightness of actions judged in terms of their consequences, on the other. And the Yoga point of view of conduct, whether it is ethical point of view or not, is a teleological point of view. The followers of Yoga school can very well say that the causal connection between ahimsā and kaivalya does not rule out one's freedom and responsibility involved in choosing kaivalya as the goal and the eightfold path of yoga as the means to it.

But Prof, Bharadwaja's first argument cannot be answered, I think, in a staight forward way. I would like to answer it by raising two questions and discussing them.

- (i) Does a pont of view ceases to be moral if, according to it, the prescribed goals of conduct are non-moral in nature?
- (ii) Has every egoistic ethics got to be self-inconsistent?

The first question is relevant to any teleogoical ethics because it is in teleogical ethics that the consequences of action play an important role in the moral estimation of action. But has the consequence of a moral action got to be a 'moral consequence' in any teleogical ethics? Perhaps contrary is the case, if William Frankena is justified in elucidating teleological theory of ethics in following words:

"A Teleological theory says that the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory etc. is the non-moral value that is brought into being".

So, the fact that *Yoga* prescribes the non-moral goals like *kaivalya* or *nirbīja-samādhī* as the goals of moral action does not go contrary to the possibility that *Yoga* has a moral perspective.

This however, does not rule out Prof. Bharadwaj's main objection because he would say that *ahimsa* is not a moral regulator of action, not simply because it is supposed to lead to a non-moral goal but it is not a moral regulator because the goal that it is supposed to lead to is an egoistic goal. He would claim that an egoistic moral theory cannot be consistently maintained as a moral theory. This brings us to the second question mentioned above. A contextualised version of this second question may be given as follows:

If ahimsā-conduct is supposed to lead to an egoistic goal (such as kaivalya), is it self-inconsistent to regard ahimsā-conduct as moral? (And if it is not self-inconsistent, what makes ahimsa-counduct a moral conduct rather than non-moral?)

I think the follower of the Yoga school of Patanjali could answer these questions on the following lines:

There is not perfect synonym for 'moral' or ethical' used by the author of Yogasūtras. But the general characteristics of all the vamas given by him in Y.S.2.31 have a typically moral aspect. Here yamas are understood as the regulations of behaviour (or regulated forms of behaviour) which are to be followed by a yogin with regard to all beings indiscriminately. i.e; irrespectively of caste, location, time or condition. In other words, Yamas are regulated forms of behaviour that are essentially universal(sarvabhauma) and unconditional((anavacchinna). This, Patañjali is suggesting, is the general form of all yamas. Now, ahimsa, which according to Vyasa's commentary on the Yogasūtras is the highest of all the yamas, has been interpreted as abstension from harming others. By introducing ahimsa in this way, the author of Yogasūtras is prescribing to Yogin that the abstension from harming others should be practised universally and unconditionally. It is obvious that ahimsa, as conceived in this way, is directly concerned with the well-being of all beings. It is a moral regulation of conduct in a well-recognised sense of the word 'moral' And it is a moral regulation in the sense elucidated by Prof. Bharawaia too.

The direct goal of ahimsā, in this way, is inalienably connected with the well-being of all. It is possible to claim that it is so connected in a negative way because it does not amount to bringing about (or trying to bring about) positively the well being of others, but it only amounts to abstension from involving oneself in any kind of

activities harmful to the well-being of others. But the negative character of *ahimsā* does not go contrary to its moral character.

At this stage Prof. Bharawaja can legitimately raise the following objection. Though the direct aim of ahimsā is concerned with the well being of all, its indirect aim which may be described in terms of asuddhiksaya, jnānadiptī, vivekakhyātī and kaivalya is egoistic in nature. One expects that the aim of a moral act, whether it is the direct aim or indirect aim, should be of the nature of universal good and not reducible to one's own good. Let us deal with this point in the next section.

(D) The question of universalism versus egoism :

Although there is a point in Prof. Bharadwaja's possible argument suggested above, something can still be said for defending the moral character of the *Yoga* perspective. I would like to argue by distinguishing between two views which seem to be very close to each other.

- (i) Kaivalya is a desirable goal, but it cannot be achieved without practising yamas. And yamas are universal and unconditional regulations of conduct.
- (ii) Yamas may be regarded as the right forms of conduct only insofar as they are means to kaivalya. This view (ii) may further assume either of the two forms:
- (a) It would be proper even not to follow yamas, if it can lead to kaivalya.9
- (b) Yamas are by definition those forms of action which are necessary for the achievement of kaivalya.

Although both the above views viz., (i) and (ii) are egoistic, they represent two different forms of egoism. The second view advocates egoism even at the cost of morality. Here, egoism becomes either an oriterion for accepting or rejecting moral mode of conduct or it becomes a 'defining feature' of morality. The first view, on the other hand, does not make egoism either a criterion or a defining feature of morality, although it recommends the egoistic goal called *kaivalya* and regards morality as an essential means to it.

Now, if we consider Patanjali's system of Yoga, we find that out of the two views stated above. the second view is conspicuously

absent from the yoga-system. But the first one seems to be present there very clearly because Yoga-system clearly asserts the causal connection between Yogāngas and kaivalya. Here, the moral nature of yamas is not defined or regulated by the concept of kaivalya in any way. Kaivalya, which is an egoistic spiritual goal, is, however, supposed to be a natural culmination of the practice of yamas along with the other aspects of the eightfold path of Yoga.¹⁰

We can, therefore, say that the egoistic goal put forth by the system of Yoga does not violate or polute the moral character of $ahims\bar{a}$ and the other yamas and hense there is no inconsistency here between egoism and morality.

A general conclusion of the above considerations is that egoism need not necessarily be contrary to morality: that ethical egoism in every form is not a self-inconsistency. Much depends on the nature of the egoistic goal and its relationship with morality that a particular egoistic system prescribes. If it prescribes a goal which can be pursued only by moral means and cannot be pursued by immoral means and if the criterion or the defining feature of morality itself is not egoistic but universalistic, then the egoistic system can still be said to be having a moral perspective in the sense specified earlier.

I grant that even at this stage one can distinguish between at least three kinds of moral perspectives:

- (i) A moral perspective according to which moral action is supposed to be an ultimate goal by itself; that is, morality is intrinsically valuable. This is roughly the Kantain approach, which is regarded as deontological.
- (ii) A moral perspective according to which moral action is supposed to have a (moral or non-moral) goal which is describable in terms of universal / general good (or the greatest good of the greatest number). This is roughly Mill's approach which is regarded as utilitarian.
- (iii) A moral perspective according to which moral action could have a goal which is an individual good. But that individual good should be such that it can be achieved through moral means and never through immoral means. *Yoga* approach belongs to this type.

One can certainly go further and claim that the first two perspectives are to be graded higher as moral perspectives as compared to the third perspective, because the ultimate goal of morality in the latter is not a universalistic goal in any way. I do not think I can make at present any claim for or against such a view. I am satisfied, if the latter

perspective is not deprived of its status as a moral perspective.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1. A normative approach in order to be 'moral' in this sense need not incorporate the expressions 'sādhāraṇadharma' as such but it has to contain some notion of 'universalistic' norms according to which the well-being of all human beings without descrimination is given prime importance. These norms in the given system may not be made obligatory for all (and therefore they may not be called 'dharma') but they may still be prescribed for all. So, sometimes the notions like vrata (vow) sīla (good conduct) and yama (controlled conduct) happen to be introduced which have prescriptive or recommendatory character instead of dharma which has obligatory character.
- Puruşarthasunyanām guņanām pratīprasavah kaivalyam svarūpapratisthā vā citisāktirīti Yogasūtras of Patānjali (In brief, Y.S.) 4.34.
- 3. Loc. cit.
- Yogascittavrttinirodhah' Y.S. 1.2. Vyāsa explicitly equates Yoga with samādhī in Vyāsabhāṣyā on Y.S. 1.1.
- 5. 'Asmitā' which marks the form of consciousness exhibited in the highest state of samprajītāta samādhī (a kind of sabīja samādhī) signifies an awareness or belief in which activity and consciousness form a unity. (For the forms exhibited in samprajītāta-samādhī and the order between them see Y.S. 1.17 with Vyāsabhāsya. For the definition of asmitā as the imposed unity of (passive) awareness and (active) intellect, see Y.S.2.6).
- 6. Indian Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. XI, no. 2, April 1984, pp. 171 to 177.
- The same argument will apply to the Yoga conception of niyamas and four bhavanās viz., maitri, karunā, muditā and upekṣā.
- G.E. Moore, Ethics, Home University Library of Modern Knowledge, London, 1912, The chapter on Free Will.
- 9. In the Mathara-vṛtti of Sāmikhyakārikā, for instance, a view of this kind is advocated. Mathaya says in his commentary of Sāmkhyakārikā No. 69. "In the opinion of Lord Kapila no action is to be performed as obligatory, but the knowledge of the twenty five concepts of Samkhyaites as similar and dissimilar from each other is the cause of the highest good. It is also said that: Laugh, drink, enjoy and be merry, always enjoy the

sensuous objects, do not have any doubt. If you know the view of Kapila, then you will achieve the pleasure of emancipation". Sānkhya-Saptati-Vṛṭṭi (V.) Ed. Soloman E.A., Gujarat University, Ahmedabad (1973) p. 125 (Trans. Mine). From the above passage it seems that there might have been at least a subschool of Sānkhya system according to which morality was not essential for Kaivalya.

10. Taimini I.K. seems to support this kind of interpretation of the relation between yamas and kaivalya when he says: "Yama and Niyama, the first two Angas of Yoga are meant to provide an adequate moral foundation for the yogic training. The very fact that they are placed before the other Angas shows their basic character". -The Science of yoga by Taimini I.K. The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1961, p. 206.

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