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The Notion Of The Term *Bonum* In The Vedic Texts

I shall start my considerations with an outline of the ethical model in the classical Indian thought. The first question connected with this problem, which arises to everybody who was born in the European culture, is to find some equivalent for the Latin term *bonum*. I think that there is no equivalent of this term in Sanskrit. Thus, I find it important to examine this problem, to answer this question and to compare *bonum* with a group of related terms. My paper will include both a philological analysis and a basic model for ethical consideration.

First, I shall discuss various groups of the words denoting the terms: good, bad, and good-bad as a pair. In Sanskrit prefix „su” describing some positive value is more general. Here we have: *su-asti* – well being, fortune, luck, success; *su-kṛta* – good or righteous deed, meritorious act, reward, recompense, well done or made or formed or executed; *su-dharma* – good law, justice, duty; *su-carita* – well conducted, moral, virtuous. When we look for the group denoting something that we should attain or gain we have: *hita* – put, placed, set, laid, fixed, planned, given, beneficial, convenient, suitable, benefit, advantage, profit, good; *bhadra* – blessed, auspicious, fortunate, gracious, friendly, kind, excellent, good, i.e., skilful; *bhāga* – good fortune, fortunate lot, luck, destiny; *śubha* – splendid, bright, beautiful, pleasant, suitable, fit, good; *kalyāṇa* – beautiful, auspicious, illustrious, noble; *kuśala* – right, proper, suitable; *kṛema* – giving rest or ease or security, happiness; *bhṛti* – well being, prosperity, might, power; *śreyas* – more splendid, more beautiful, more excellent, best, superior. All of these terms are related

to the term „good” with its sensual conotation. Things which are considered as good, nice or kind for us are connected with gaining or keeping goods marked with their sensual characteristics. The sensual conotation is connected with the realm of the unmanifested world as well as with aesthetical issues. The Indian do not consider the manifested level as the absolutely real one. Therefore, the „good”, by definition, cannot be something ultimate. Yet, the above mentioned terms do not include the meaning of „good” as something „useful”. For this understanding they employ another group of terms: *artha* – cause, motive, reason, advantage, thing, object, object of the senses, wealth, property; *upayoga* – use, fitness, any act tending to a desired object, good conduct, observing established practices; *phala* – fruit, consequence, effect, result, retribution, gain or loss; *l̥bha* – obtaining, getting, attaining, gain, profit. And here we also deal with the aesthetical rather than pureles ethical issue.

We have some groups of terms, which very often come together as the opposed terms: *hita-ahita*, *śubha-aśubha*, *bhadra-abhadra*. They are related to the first group. We also have a group denoting first „virtue” and then „good”. It includes: *puṣya* – auspicious, propitious, fair, pleasant, good, right, virtuous, meritorious, pure, holy, sacred; *sukṛta*; *sucarita*; *s̃dhuṃvrttam* – well rounded, well conducted, virtuous or honest man; *dharmya* – legal, legitimate, just, virtuous, righteous.

The term „bad” is primarily connected with its opposition to the „good”. And here we have simply contradictory terms like: *as̃dhu*, *adharmya*, *aśubha*, *ahita*, *akuśala*. We have also the prefix „*dus*” describing something with the negative value: *du'ta* – spoiled, corrupted, deffective, faulty, wrong, false, bad, wicked, guilty; *durgati* – misfortune, distress, poverty, hell; *du'krta* – wrongly or wickedly done, badly arranged, evil action, sin, guilt. The above terms are related to the situation initially appearing as good. That situation is going to be spoiled. The primary harmony, the primary perfect order is going to be damaged. Next, we have the group of terms with the independent ethymology: *p̃pa* – bad, vicious, wicked, evil, wretched, vile, low; *do'a* – fault, vice, deficiency, want, inconvenience, disadvantage, damage, harm, bad consequences, *kleśa* – pain, affliction, distress, anguish, wordly occupation, trouble. To throw something out of balance or to spoil the harmony is connected with mistake and is called „bad”. This

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mistake does not come from the outside, it is just lack of the inner harmony.

All the groups under our consideration refer to the profanum stage as well as to the sacrum one. This division comes out of the primordial cosmogonic rite. The myth of the *Puru'a* from the *Puru'as'kta* is the earliest pattern for that rite. The world, which emerged as the result of the primordial sacrifice is the order and the harmony. It can suggest that the ideal order is inherent in the pre-creational stage. That models shows that the world, widely understood as the macro and microcosmos and all categories that govern these orders as well as all relations between them, are of the same nature. All of them are manifestations of the one pre-ent-ity.

In the unmanifested world there does not exist any absolute, independent category or any value, and their contradictions are of the same nature. The acting that is submitted to the primary order, and which imitates it, is called the „good acting” – *sukrta*. It can be judged rather as the proper acting than as the good one because its fulfilling does not bring extra reward. However, the one who did not fulfil his duties to the cosmic orders, is punished. That punishment is called the sin – *pāpa*.

This understanding is connected with the primary ritual act. The primary being related to the ritual act is an ideal state, state of harmony. The state of harmony comes out of sacrifice and it is maintained by the sacrifice. Therefore the basic prescription is connected with persistence of that state, i.e., with the re-construction of the cosmogony. When the primary state is taken as the state of harmony and the perfect one, all acts must follow the primary rules. Looking for something new is treated as spoiling the primordial harmony. The proper celebration of the sacrifice is called *sukrta*. When some mistake, some deviation from a rule occurs, the sacrifice is called *du'krta*.

In this context, it is quite natural to describe the term „bad” as something connected with the lack, with the mistake, with the incomplete acting, with the impure thing or with the sin. I think that it is only if we explain ethymological sources of these terms by the idea of the ritual act we are justified in understanding such a group of terms as denoting the negative values. Therefore „bad”

means something that spoils the primary harmony, something that does not imitate the cosmic order.

Pan-Indian Law of *Karma* generally arose out of such interpretations of the terms: *sukṛta* and *du'krta*. The ethymology of the word „*karman*” comes from the same root „*kr*” as the terms denoting „good and bad” describing generally the act, the doing. The act – *karman* is not understood as an independent event. It turns back because it arises out of previous events, and it looks ahead because it carries the consequences of these events. The Law of *Karma* transcends and, at the same time, contains diametrically opposed values „good and bad”. Such comprehension of the values is characteristic for *saṃsāra*.

In this context, it is very interesting to examine how the term „*sukṛta*” describes the man. The best example we find in the *Upanishads*, especially in the *Aitareya*. After subsequent manifestations of the primary being, out of the face of the primordial man arise entities which are treated as the divinities. They are called at the same time *devatā* – divinities and *indriya* – senses. Thus, their sensual character with all its consequences is pointed out here. The self – *ātman* marks the divinities with thirst and hunger, which is connected with *kāma* – the main impulse of doing and acting of these entities in the manifested world.

As long as somebody exists in the realm of the manifested world, he is submitted to the nature of the *kāma* – desire and he experiences the world by the senses. Therefore, the most common outer reception of the world would be translated into the aesthetic categories. And that what meant at the beginning: „I like it, I don't like it” or „it is good for me or not” starts to be treated as the absolute categories as: “it is generally good” or „it is generally bad”.

Coming back to the *Aitareya* we see that only the man can comprise all created worlds. The man is called „*sukṛta*”, the same as the proper celebrated sacrifice. The proper celebrated sacrifice imitates the primary cosmogonic myth and the man imitates by himself all the manifested worlds. The term „*sukṛta*” does not refer to the pre-creative stage but to the first stage, the first hipostasis of the manifested world.

All the terms under discussion appear as the relative categories and they are secondarily absolutised out of aesthetical values. But classical Indian thought accepted the intention to attain the ultimate ethical model as the postulated ideal of acting. It is obviously

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connected with accepting the model in which the full reality and perfectness can be ascribed only to unconditioned, primordial world. The realization of that would can be called *mok'a* – the release of the conditioned point of view. It is not the aim of this paper to resolve the fundamental problem what is the best way to attain *mok'a*: the proper acting – *karman*, the proper knowledge – *vidyā* or, maybe the combination of these two. Anyway, even in the systems related to *jñānakṛdīya*, we always have to deal with some way of acting and with some system of ethics. And an ethical system works on the basic opposition of terms: good – bad. It is very important to find some point that can be the starting point for such interpretation of the ethical problems.

In the *Kaṇha Upanishad* there appears a fragment which may be interesting for our considerations. This passage is put in the context of the learning given by *Yama* to *Naciketas*. The first stages of this learning concern the explanations of the ritual formulae, that means, they are closes to the *Vedic* ritual, to the *Brhmaṇa*. By that explanation these texts designate the place and the way of acting of the man in the world. The final fragment of the *Kaṇha Upanishad* speaks about the method of *yoga*. It is one of the oldest fragments where *yoga* is presented as the technical method of self-transformations and self-realizations. The goal of that method is to quit *saḍsara*, i.e., to attain *mok'a*. Therefore, the beginning and the end of that *Upanishad* shows two oppositely oriented goals. One is connected with maintaining the world by means of sacrifice, the second is interested in liberation, in the escape from the world of *karman* and *saḍsara* by means of *yoga*. The above goals are marked by the two principal ethical values. The choice between them is responsible for remaining within *saḍsara* or with attaining *mok'a*.

„The good is one thing, the gratifying is quite another;
 their goals are different, both bind a man.
 Good things await him who picks the good;
 by choosing the gratifying, one misses one's goal.
 Both the good and the gratifying
 present themselves to a man;
 The wise assess them, note their difference;

and choose the good over the gratifying;
But the fool chooses the gratifying
rather than what is beneficial.”

Kaṇha 2.1–2 (by Patrick Olivelle)

The above fragment confirms all our considerations on the subject of „good and bad”. From the linguistic analysis and by appealing to the model of the world marked by the cosmogonic rite, we came to the conclusion that is very difficult to speak about the absolute values in the ethical aspect. And also here, although the description is related to the opposition „good and bad”, the choice is not simply judged as „good” or „bad”. This is connected with the absolute good, i.e., *mok'a*, which is called *śreyas*. The term *śreyas* denotes something most splendid, most beautiful, the highest good, fortune, the state of happiness sometimes connected with possession of many goods. A similar state is designated in other *Upanishadic* places by the terms *sukha* – happiness or even *ānanda* – bliss. Keeping in mind that Sanskrit terms from the first *Vedic* texts denote the goal and the way to gain that goal simultaneously, we see that the choice of the realm of one value is connected with the aim, i.e., with the *mok'a*.

The description of the polarization of the two ways, of the two models of life, symbolised by the terms *śreyas* and *preyas* reminds us of the Stoic understanding of the wise. The fragment of *Kaṇha* discussed above shows that in the *Upanishads* and among the Stoicks as well, we cannot speak about the gradation of the good and of the wise. Someone can be totally wise or he is not wise at all. He is a wise who knows, that is, who knows the real nature of reality and of the world. By that knowledge he can attain *mok'a*. It takes a lot of time, it requires a lot of work but the effect is immediate. And if the equation *jñāna* = *mok'a* is true, it means that the notion of the wise cannot be graded. The wise denotes somebody who possesses the whole knowledge. The acting plays a secondary role. What does the secondary role mean was the point of discussion among Indian philosophers and theologians. Till now, however they have not found an ultimate solution.

In the light of the above considerations, we have to look for the description of the realm of *preyas* which is put in the opposition to the term *śreyas*. The realm of *śreyas* is univocally good, homogeneous, it is the return to the *ur*, the state of the ultimate harmony.

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And the realm of the *preyas* is the realm of acting, of gradation. The term *preyas* is the comparative of the adjective – *priya* – liked, favourite, wanted, own, dear. So, the realm of *preyas* denotes something more and more nice, dear...in the sensual and volitional context. The choices of somebody who belongs to the realm of *preyas* are motivated by feelings and desires – *k̃ma*. And *k̃ma* is the basic motive on which sinking in *saḌs̃ra* depends. Thus, once again we see that all categories comprising the manifested level of the world have merely relative values.