Cultural Values and Perennial Elements*

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Renewal and regeneration of culture seems to be founded on elements of culture that persist. If culture is a basic engagement of man then it must be founded on perennial element or elements. An object peculiarly specific to the domain of culture is 'value'. We hear that two cultures are different because they have different value systems. What exactly is the nature of 'value'? What kind of entities are 'values'? What role do they play in experience, cognition and action? How do they arise and change? Phenomena of the recreation of culture – either on the strength of its sources or its body or its purposes – will become analytically accessible through reflection on the nature, carrier and function of 'value'. In particular, the phenomenon of acculturation among different people implicates the question of the relation between cultural values and perennial elements.

A powerful strand of thought maintains that Indian cultural values are founded on perennial elements. However, it is not clear as to what the nature of perennial is and how exactly values get founded in relation to it. Value Monism is a popular attitude that maintains values are search for what gives pleasure without pain and unifying value is value of self-realisation; higher values are *aprameye* (not object to knowledge), and; values are *upādhi*-s for ultimate source. On the one hand, values (at least higher ones) are not supposed to be an object of knowledge and on the other hand, values apparently coalesce into a super-value. There is

a need to advance argument for value monism if these claims have to be rigorously founded. For, arguments behind various traditional proposals of *advaita* will not readily apply in case of cultural values.

We show that there are varieties of proposals of *advaita* based on phenomena of *śabda, rasa, nāda* and *vāstu* in the domain of language, poetics, music and architecture. In addition, there is the *advaita* of Śankara and the *Śaiva advaita*. Their unification is still an open problem. Besides, there is a serious flaw in "*neti neti. . .*" argument, which instead points towards plurality of perennial elements of reality. Further, we show that values are non-experiential entities and thus they cannot be *upādhi*-s of any unique experiential *Brahman*.

Values are instead shown to be judicative entities. We propose that ratiocination of values is fundamentally formal and propose two principles as formal articulation of juridical omniscience. Such formal omniscience is an ultimate source of plural values. Further, it is shown that though values are non-experiential but they are knowable and cognizable. Claim is made that it is possible to derive kernel values of cultured society from the formal omniscience. Formal omniscience is fundamentally different from any essential or substantive claim regarding *the perennial*. We close by pointing that the proposed thesis is in consonance with basic definition of *Veda* and implies a non-standard interpretation of *Gītā*.

Plurality in the Conception of Brahman

Bhartṛhari's [*Vākyapādīya* 1.1] proposal for *Śabda Brahman* rests on the solid basis of the phenomena of coalescing of verbs [*Māhābhāṣya* pp.181-182] and the fundamentality of verbs [*Nirukta* 1.1] in language. Verb is long known to be an entity capable of coalescing and partitioning (admitting *samānādhikaraṇya* and *vyāvṛtādhikaraṇya* with each other). Besides, other words, which are not conventions, are derivable from verbal roots. Emanationism of language from transcendental (*parā*) source is also suggested in *Vāk Śukta* of *Ṛgveda* strengthening the argument for *Śabda-Brahman*. It is not obvious whether the *Śabda-Brahman*, transcendental sound, argued for by linguists is same in character with Śankara's *Brahman*. Bhartṛhari himself, in the very next verse, wonders if there are many *Brahmā*-s. Similarly, *Rasa-Brahman* [*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7; *Nātya Śāstra* 6.36] based on the phenomena of emotive feelings, *Nāda-Brahman* [*Sangīta Ratnākara* 1.2.1-5] based on the phenomena of inarticulate sound of musical feeling and *Vāstu-Brahman* [*Samarāngana Sūtradhāra* 2.4] based on the phenomena of visual feeling, have been differently argued for and are different experiential creatures. They had been postulated to account for certain artistic facts and experiences of different types. Accordingly each of them expresses themselves in different arts. Attempt to unify them had been made from the standpoints of *Śaiva advaita* (by

Abhinavagupta) as well as *Śaiva dvaita* (by Śrīkaṇṭha and Rāmakaṇṭha). Nageśa Bhaṭṭa also attempted unification, however, the unification problem still remains an open issue. The question is, can, along the similar lines, there be a demonstration of *Mūlya-Brahman?* The point is that on what ground can entities like 'value' be privileged to be specific or special *upādhi*-s of *Brahman* if at all they are seen to be so?

Fallacy in "neti neti. . ." argument implies Plurality of Perennial Elements

Śankara's *Brahman* is much more extensive and all-inclusive. Powerful "*neti neti. . .*" argument [*Bṛhadāra-ṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.3.6] adopted by Śankara *advaita* is generally applicable for all *bādhita* entities, acts and forms of knowledge. This *tarka*, which can be called 'mother of all *tarka*', banks on eliminative reason that actually involves trans-finite steps in recursive manner to demonstrate existence of *Brahman*. By eliminating one by one, any feature that can be referred to by 'this particular' in more than finite number of steps, the argument arrives at transcendental *Brahman*. It is because of trans-finite steps in the argument that modern rendering of *advaita* is often expressed in terms of infinity. Often it is said, "all finite stuff falls short of the infinite" and even that "finite emanates from and returns to the infinite." However, there is a very serious flaw in the argument.

There is no reason that trans-finite steps would yield a unique infinity. In fact, traditional Jaina *ananta rāśi gaṇita* [*Saṭkhaṇḍāgama* III, p.18 & p.126] and Cantor's modern trans-finite algebra have both convincingly proved that there can be plural

infinities. Thus, "not this, not this..." eliminative reason would not prove existence of one perennial element but rather point towards a possibility of plural perennial elements. There is an unfounded assumption in the Śankara's *tarka* that there is just a unique infinity. In fact, even the assumption that there is a highest trans-finite has been mathematically shown to lead to contradiction [Russell, pp. 124-125] much like Vaiśeṣika argument that it would be contradictory for the universe to be a 'whole'. "*Neti neti. . .*" argument does not prove unique perennial element, instead it points towards plurality of perennial elements.

Moreover, Advaita requires Values to be Experiential Entities

Besides, from an altogether independent considerations, Śankara's *Brahman* has been propos-ed as an experiential entity. This is also true about other proposals of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is supposedly experienced as *param ānanda* by yogi-s in the state of *akhaṇḍa samādhi*. *Brahman* is also a perennial experience in the state of *mokṣa*. Śankara *advaita* implies that in principle there cannot be anything that cannot be *experienced*. Further, it implicitly accepts that not everything can be *known*, for, *Brahman* is *anirvacanīya* (in-expressible). Thus, ultimate reality is experiential but beyond knowledge according to Śankara *advaita*. Values necessarily will have to be experiential entities for them to be *upādhi*-s of *Brahman*.

Values belong to the Realm that is Non-Experiential but Knowable

It is a doubtful proposition that value is experienced (*anubhuta*) since

value is always 'value of. . .' For, if value is a felt content then 'value of a felt content' could be a 'value of value' and so on *ad infinitum*. Such an infinite regress means that value is not a psychologically-experienced entity. This points towards a simplest and gravest of error when 'experience of value' is spoken of. 'Cognition of cognition' and 'feeling of feeling' and even 'feeling of the want of feeling' do not lead to regress because temporal and locational gaps punctuates one content from other even though the contents are of the same type. Copulation of value with experienced object in 'value of. . .' is atemporal and instantaneous. All feelings are temporally extended but not values, which are merely adventitiously instantiated in temporally extended entities. Thus, value is not an experiential entity at all. Being non-experiential, values cannot be *upādhi*-s of experiential *Brahman* in any straightforward manner. It is instead credible to think that 'value' belongs to a class of objects categorized as *adṛṣṭa* (not experienced) by Mīmāṃsā and Vaiśeṣika. To account for 'value', a non-experiential realm that is nonetheless knowable has to be accepted, quite in contravention of *advaita*. This sounds like a queer turn of argument involving a seemingly paradoxical proposition that asserts 'existence of a knowable non-experiential realm'. Cognition is experienced and cognition imbeds values that are not experienced! Indeed, defense and characterization of such a realm involves one of the subtlest exercises of reason.

Values are Judicative Entities

Usually 'value-of. . .' is rendered as an adjectival construction on objects, as in: "The object has this value." The

object is either a known content (like a stone or pleasure/pain) or a willed content (like desire or contentment/discontentment). Unlike the statement "stone has red colour" where 'red' firmly belongs to 'stone', valuation of stone cannot be said to be belonging to stone in the same sense. While object does not imply value, value necessarily refers to the object. For, object can subsist without transactional, aesthetic or moral valuation and moreover, valuation of object might vary drastically. Value is not an entity existent in an object. Nor is value a mental content ascripted in an object, since value is not an experienced content. Atemporal conjunction between an object and valuation is instead judicative. This needs explanation.

If a person values an object, it shows up in his/her subsequent actions involving that object. However, when some other person reads that action, value, which in-formed that action, is not read. Instead, another person values that action afresh rather autonomously. Valuation of value is simply not done. Other person freshly ascertains value of object, in this case action of a person, while reading that object. Thus, value that in-formed the action and the read value of action are different. In fact, all situations of 'value conjoined-of object' are in a sense radically novel. Value is like a hammer that falls on judgment. And the hammer falls every time anew in every location. It is in this sense that content of value is impersonally judicative rather than content dwelling in an objective object or in a subjective object.

Formal Ratiocination of Values

This hints towards desirability of trans-objective and trans-subjective foundations of value. For, otherwise without such a foundation there would be anarchy of values. Every moment of every person could be under the spell of different values. If there is no 'value of value', no judging of judicative content, then how can consequent anarchy and cacophony of values be tamed? This is a key question. If all values are stand-alone judicative terminals, then where is a scope for conflict and conflation in values? How can disharmony/harmony in values be accounted-for? We propose a thesis that ratiocination of values is entirely formal and non-valuational. There can be a purely formal distinction between judicious values and non-judicious values.

Actions of men often conflict. As a consequence men run into disputes. Men are primordially disposed to resolve them. In the situation of disharmony, discord, conflict or injustice, men are constitutionally disposed to articulate justice and execute it. Conflict or discord is *felt* but different actors value this feeling differently. Craving for judicious way out takes discord itself as an object and values it afresh. Judicious act, the act that resolves discord, is able to quench the recurrence of *felt* discord by establishing a fresh judicious value. It may be noted that value need not be a simple entity like 'preference' but its knowledge can take a form of a 'norm' as is the case in moral values. To understand ratiocination of values, let us indulge in an instructive thought experiment.

As a thought experiment let us collect all acts of justice from the past of humanity. Such a set *prima facie* sounds like an inconsistent set since justice here is different from justice there and justice now is different from justice then. Justice supposedly varies over time and location; justice varies in accordance with culture and history. Nevertheless, let us look for a ground that can make this set consistent. If at a meta-level we accept the following two principles, the set can be made complete and consistent:

1. *All actions are readable.* No action of men can be hidden from human gaze. So all discordant actions that have been adjudicated would figure in the set. Rather, all actions would figure in the set since each action is a valued action, an adjudicated action, founded on some discontent. Thus, completeness of the set is ensured.

2. *All disputes are judiciable.* No dispute is there which in principle is not judiciable. Not that every discord or dispute in past has been adjudicated, but only that in principle they were all judiciable. It is possible to articulate and execute justice in any discordant situation though it is not the case that disputes in the past have been actually resolved. Thus, consistency of the set can be founded on this principle at a meta-level since any adjudication will be a member of the extended set of past and future actions.

These principles not only help make the set complete and consistent but also endow the set with rich structure of formal relation among values that in-form action.

Formal Omniscience as Source of Values

These two principles, first an omniscience principle and second a trans-jural principle, are purely formal conditions. Without the first principle, justice will become entirely manipulable. Without the second principle, the idea and the hope of justice itself will be a casualty. In fact, these principles are formal conditions for the very possibility of justice. Moreover, these principles are

sufficient formal articulation of *juridical omniscience*. If the set were to be extended, as continued thought experiment, to all of future as well, even conflicts among different acts of justice in past would be resolved as instantiated in one or other specific member of a set. Thus, the extended set acquires structural features that formally relate different members of the set. All members of the extended set get mapped to other members. There can indeed be no truly stand-alone member. If the map is conceived as directed, there might be members that are terminals. We can call them fiats, which are a special kind of judicious actions. They may repeatedly figure in the set. Such terminal fiats will be perennial in a sense that their relation with unresolved acts is formally always there and they are themselves never adjudicated. However, there can be plural fiats that are formally compatible. Values tend to surrogate fiats in cognition.

One advantage of this thought experiment is that one can legitimately conceive of cognition that compares different values, even ensure possibility of making distinction between judicious value and non-judicious values in the same cognition. For, formally a pure non-content is instantiated in cognition as organizer of its content. Discourse of values thus become possible without sacrificing commitment to non-experiential nature of value and to illegitimacy of 'value of value'. Formal organization of values, owing to juridical omniscience, makes possible their knowability.

Knowability of Values

Cognition of values, in spite of being non-object, in spite of being non-experiential, is possible through the secondary processes of 'collective cognitions' (*samohālambana jñāna*) and 'cognition becoming an object of cognition' (*anuvyavasāya*). However, there is a deeper process, underlying any cognition, namely, from structure-less *felt cognition* (*nirvikalpa jñāna*) to structured *veridical cognition* (*savikalpa jñāna*). Even veridical cognition is *felt* although veridical cognition comes to implicate non-object in two ways – (1) it implicates pure form of punctuators [Navjyoti ch. 9], which gives it structure, and (2) it implicates *upādhi*-s (adventitious entities), which are non-objects and are formal classes. Self-terminating automatic process from felt cognition to veridical cognition occurs in accordance with the logic of punctuators and has been characterized elsewhere [Navjyoti ch. 9]. In case of veridical cognition of values, values figure in as *upādhi*-s, as non-objects or formal classes carved out of the set of juridical omniscience.

Dharma/adharma are traditionally regarded by Vaiśeṣika vision as non-experiential qualities (*adṛṣṭa guṇa*) of self (*ātman*) that in-forms various transactions of self [*Praśasta-pādabhāṣya* p. 27, 208-209]. Nonetheless, *dharma/adharma* get veridically cognized as *upādhi*-s, which themselves can be immutably founded on formal juridical omniscience. Cognition can have essential contents as well as formal contiguities implicating adventitious content. We have developed formal theory of contiguity elsewhere [Navjyoti ch. 5, 8 & 9]. Thus, it can be maintained that 'non-experiential knowable realm' is traditionally conceived and we have only proposed its formal foundation. Values are creatures of this realm and are perfectly knowable like any *upādhi*. *Dharma/adharma* are traditional Indian terms for values.

Derivation of Society and Moral Values from Formal Omniscience

Once the above-articulated principles are accepted, we can go ahead with determining various features of the set of past deeds and hence derive certain kernel values that operate in human society today. Set of past actions is different from the set inclusive of future actions though both are informed by juridical omniscience. Past set is actualized in present as cultural reality; past set is actualized in present in terms of recollection of its elements. Past set can be bifurcated into two domains – (1) domain of terminal fiats, which get recalled today as moral content or judicious values, and (2) domain of suspended justice, which gets recalled today as unresolved actions or memory of injustice. Present, in which alone motor action can take place, in any case is the domain of suspended justice since judicious actions are still being sought.

Moral values are solidified sedimentations of frequently occurred judicious fiats of the past. Their observance rules-out occurrence of discords whose resolution they were in the first place. These are intuited instructions of the past that are silently operative at present. But action-packed present is jurally open. Discords keep surfacing. However, men are primordially disposed to resolve them. In doing so each man is jurally autonomous in a sense that each man has autonomous access to juridical omniscience. All persons are constitutionally equipped to resolve discords but not psychologically and materially endowed to handle them. Material platform, the occasion to address discord, do not often obtain. Often determinants of dispute get clouded because of psychological reasons. Either discord is resolved by judicious actions or justice remains

suspended. Under situation of suspension, moral values loose operational anchorage in reality and become mere ideals.

In case of suspended justice, the jural autonomy of each person involved slips out, since it is not exercised and its innate efficacy is compromised. If jural autonomy is compromised, it slides out and comes to rest in some locale or other in expectation to be exercised. Genesis of power lies in accumulation and gathering of gliding jural autonomy of people because of proliferating situations of suspended justice. It is people at the helm of power or otherwise who assume responsibility of formulating and administering judicious actions that would resolve suspended discords. Without this responsibility natural power will simply evaporate and anarchy will ensue. Structure of human society is contours of definite containment in slippage of jural autonomy of individual. We have derived basic elements of this structure in details elsewhere [Navjyoti 2002 pp. 87-126].

From typology of human actions and associated discord it can be inferred that four power-towers get formed apart from many surrogate power-centers – (1) educational authority; (2) financial authority; (3) political authority, and (4) religious authority. Access to juridical omniscience in these authorities can recover justice, otherwise gravest of fault will permeate society. To take care of the fault-bed of anarchy, slippage of jural autonomy accumulates in a fifth power-center – prophetic authority – that articulates resolution of fault-bed. Classically, it is called *pañca varṇa*. It is only an access to fiats that alone, and moreover, in any situation, empowers navigation of the domain of suspended justice.

Some Illustrations of Kernel Values

Various perennial elements of juridical omniscience, fiats, are operative as kernel cultural values. Knowledge of these values takes cognitive form of moral precepts. Traditional precepts like the once associated with the primacy of 'sharing' are such instances. For example: "Share food before you consume"; "Mother, who cooks food, does not eat before children have eaten"; "Leave the share of ants, birds and insects before you consume food"; "Feed guests before you consume." They are instituted as products of countless judicious acts embodying an apex fiat of '*pāraspāriktā*' (mutuality) including that of 'sharing'. Even precepts like: "Masons who build houses for others should not build their own house otherwise excellence will elude them"; "Weavers should not wear best of clothes they weave otherwise excellence will elude them" are related to subtle installation of the basic fiat of 'sharing' in the domain of skill. In the sphere of knowledge, fiat of 'sharing' is installed in *dharma*-s of guru (teacher) and *dharma*-s of *siṣya* (student). Apex moral fiat of 'sharing' can be read in numerous judicious deeds in our society and culture. Indeed, it is found in the sub-text of the best of civic practices that are embedded in civilizations.

Another significant fiat is *saraṇāgata rakṣate* (judiciously protect anyone who falls or seeks refuge in your dominion). Many values stem from this fiat. Wholesome upright persons at the helm of power towers or centers through their deeds are able to bring judicious closure of activities in their dominion with the help of this fiat. However, in violation of this fiat, power towers could fall pray to jealous deeds of self-

protection. *Rākṣasa* or demon is that who thinks he/she can self-protect from violation of omniscience as consequences of one's deeds. *Rākṣasī* or demonic tendency does not happen if men maintain and uphold sensibility to prevalent *dukkha* and centers of power remain oriented towards undoing situations of the suspension of justice. These centers of power develop executive apparatuses not only for the protection of power towers (*pītha-rakṣā*) but primarily for the resolution of suspended justice.

Similarly, there are values related to fiat of debt dissolution (*ṛṇa pūrti*), which are associated with transactional activities. Apart from moral precepts, there are transactional precepts and aesthetic precepts in a culture. Usually culture is taken as artistic inclinations and specificity that is informed by aesthetic values. It is possible to generalize the set of judicious action to include artistic activity (*anukṛti*). But that is a larger subject matter to be dealt with here.

Collection of Perennial Fiats is Veda

Veda is classically defined as a collection (*saṃhitā*) of beginning-less (*anādi*) and independent of human contingency (*apauruṣeya*) injunctions (*vidhī-s*). *Apauruṣeya anādi vidhī* can be rendered as *trans-subjective ab initio fiats*. And their collection or set is called *Veda. The idea of Veda is precisely the idea of consistent and complete set of judicious deeds.* Fiat is a coinage in modern language for *vidhī* or injunctive terminals that are atemporally beginning-less and utterly independent of human contingencies. However, such a collection is possible, because of necessity to render in cognition and language, only through *upādhi*-s of fiats. The body of *Veda* is constituted

by capturing (by *dṛṣṭā* of formal omniscience) of injunctive realm in a variety of ways that point towards perennial fiats.

Akṣara and Formality

There is a distinction [*Gītā* 15.16-18] made between three aspects of reality – ephemeral (*kṣara*), perennial (*akṣara*) and upright person (*puruṣottama*). Usually the division between ephemeral and perennial is seen as exhaustive. But *Gītā* alludes to the third realm, which is different from these two and is seen to transcend the first two (*. . .uttamaḥ' puruśas tu anyaḥ'*). Śankara, in his commentary, characterizes the second 'perennial realm' as *māyā* (fantasy) that exists like a heap (*kūṭastha*), and which is a forming seed (*utpatti bīja*) of the first realm. Śankara reasons that since seed of the world is endless it has to be perennial (*anekamāyāvacanādiprakāreṇa sthitaḥ kūṭasthaḥ', saṃsārabījānantyat, na kṣavati iti akṣaraḥ ucyate*). Usually *māyā* is identified with the first realm. But *māyājāla* (net of non-content) rests firmly on the second realm. It is our interpretation that the second realm is formal. Perennial is formal and content-less, which in-forms ephemeral content. One who sees formal omniscience is transcendental upright person. And formal omniscience only yields plural perennial elements (*mama eva aṃśaḥ . . . sanātanaḥ*), which in turn in-form ephemeral elements. Form is non-existent unlike the third and the first realm; Form is only a vacuous organizational principle.

Cultural values are surrogate of formal omniscience that informs set of past deeds of man. Since the set of past deeds have recollectably identifiable sections of suspension of justice that there are many cultures in the world. Cultures are partial surrogation of formal omniscience. And since formal omniscience is perennial, acculturation of different cultures can be founded on perennial fiats that alone go in the construction of jurally autonomous upright person.

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