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<https://doi.org/10.15017/2328444>

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出版情報：哲學年報. 56, pp.27-35, 1997-03-10. 九州大学文学部  
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# A NOTE ON CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS AS APPEARED IN THE TEXTS OF CLASSICAL INDIA

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1. What is happiness? By what means can we attain happiness? Is happiness something to be attained at all? If we attempt to discuss such problems, we must make clear first what our views are on the world. The ideas of happiness closely relate to our understanding of the relation between the self and the world. There might be two patterns of understanding:

- The world is regulated by natural and inevitable laws. Therefore it is by accepting and obeying them without doubts and hesitation that one can attain happiness.
- The self is restricted by the yoke of the world. Therefore it is by ridding oneself of such restraints that one can attain happiness.

In this paper, my purposes are to search these two patterns in traditional Hinduism and to analyze them.

1.1. The first pattern of the view of happiness typically existed in Vedic culture, which was pre-“Hinduism.”<sup>(1)</sup> There, the world was considered

as being regulated by celestial law of nature (*ṛta*). The sacred ritual rules of Veda (*vidhi*) represented such natural law on the earth. Therefore, in the Vedic religious world, all things were sacred. Even the ordinary way of human life was determined there by religious principles. Therefore, "at least for the man who conformed to the approved cultural norm, it was expected that this life would be happy,"<sup>(2)</sup> and consequently new life in "heaven" (*svarga*) after death was the final goal of the human life. There, rebirth in "heaven" was the supreme good.

But in Hinduism, which is post-Vedic culture, a different idea on the law that regulates the world came about, and it replaced the Vedic law. It is the famous law of "*karma*": "the relative excellence of any new birth is rigidly determined by the net balance of good and bad actions in previous births."<sup>(3)</sup> This law of "*karma*" determined an indefinite series of human lives; the Sanskrit term is "*saṃsāra*" (transmigration). F. Edgerton says: "For more than two thousand years, it appears that almost all Hindus have regarded transmigration, determined by "*karma*," as an axiomatic fact."<sup>(4)</sup>

*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.13 expresses clearly the view of happiness in such culture.

What they said was *karman* and what they praised was *karman*. Verily one becomes good by good action, bad by bad action.<sup>(5)</sup>

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(1) I will use the term "Hinduism" in the same sense as Franklin Edgerton insisted on it by using the term "Indian." Cf. F. Edgerton: *Dominant Ideas in the Formation of Indian Culture, Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol.12 (1942). He says: "it (the Vedic culture) was rather different from 'Indian' culture in some of these important respects." (p.151)

(2) F. Edgerton, *ibid.*, p.152.

(3) F. Edgerton, *ibid.*, p.152.

(4) F. Edgerton, *ibid.*, p.152.

There also, rebirth in “heaven” in consequence of good deed was desired as a goal of human life by man, but it would be the final goal no more. New birth in “heaven” is regarded not different from the present life on this world. Therefore I shall call this type of happiness “worldly happiness.”

1.2. The second pattern of the view of happiness, in India, occurred obviously in the post-Vedic culture, which is “Hinduism” in the sense of my definition. There, the law of “*karma*” is considered as binding human life. Therefore the attainment of happiness is to be realized by ridding oneself of such restraints. This is “freedom from the transmigration(*mokṣa*).” Such state is called also “*amṛtatva*” (immortality) and “*nirvāṇa*.” I shall call this type of happiness “extraterrestrial happiness.”

2. As Dr. W. Slaje discussed clearly, *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* tells the view of two types of happiness,<sup>(6)</sup> one of the philosophical texts in classical India. The technical terms in Sanskrit words for them are “*abhyudaya*” and “*niḥśreyasa*.” *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.1.2 says: “*dharma* is that from which results attainment of “*abhyudaya*” and of “*niḥśreyasa*.”<sup>(7)</sup>

And Candrānada, a commentator, paraphrased this passage as the following:

*abhyudayaḥ* ist das Erlangen eines erwünschten Körpers in den Welten *Brahmā*'s usw., und das Aufhören von Unglück.  
*niḥśreyasam* ist die die Seele betreffende Erlösung (*mokṣaḥ*) in

(5) *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.13: *tau ha yad ūcatuḥ karma haiva tad ūcatuḥ atha yat praśaṁsatuḥ karma haiva tat praśaṁsatuḥ. puṇyo vai puṇyena karmaṇā bhavati, pāpaḥ pāpeneti*. I use the translation of S. Radhakrishnan in *The Principal Upaniṣads* (Reprinted in 1978 in the United States), p.217.

(6) Walter Slaje: *niḥśreyasam* im alten Nyāya, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens*. Vol.30 (1986).

(7) *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.1.2.: *yato 'bhyudayaniḥśreyasasiddhiḥ sa dharmah*.

Form des Fehlens der spezifischen Eigenschaften [der Seele].<sup>(8)</sup>

After showing this translation, W. Slaje conclude: "Von diesen beiden inhaltlich verschiedenen Heilszuständen entspricht jedenfalls *mokṣaḥ* (VSū 5.2.20; 6.2.12–19) bzw. mit Candrānada das *niḥśreyasam* (VSū 1.1.2) dem *apavargaḥ* im Nyāya, nämlich als nicht relativierbare endgültige Erlösung ohne Wiedergeburt. *abhyudayaḥ* (VSū 6.2.1–11; 1.1.2) bezeichnet dagegen eine relativierbare Form des Heils, das durch Befolgung der rituellen Vorschriften gewonnen wird, und in einer am Erdendasein gemessen besseren Wiedergeburt in einem *brahmādilokaḥ* besteht, ohne daß damit ein endgültiges Freisein von Leid verbunden wäre. Die Nähe dieses Vaiśeṣika-*abhyudayaḥ* zum *svargaḥ* der Mīmāṃsā ist deutlich."<sup>(9)</sup>

Through the distinguished analyze of W. Slaje, we could understand that the Sanskrit word "*abhyudaya*" and "*niḥśreyasa*" are used in contrast concerning to the idea of happiness, and the former means "the worldly happiness," and the latter "the extraterrestrial happiness."

3. *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* is a philosophical work, established about 1st century A.D. I shall now search other examples in different texts. Here, I will treat *Manusmṛti*, a law-book of the age of classical India, established roughly about between 2nd century B.C. and 2nd century A.D. The following is a passage of *Manusmṛti* 12.88–90:

[88] There are two kinds of Vedic activity: the one that brings about engagement (in worldly action) and the rise of happiness, and the one that brings about disengagement (from

<sup>(8)</sup> *Candrānandavṛtti in Vaiśeṣikasūtra with the commentary of Candrānanda*, ed. Muni Jambuvijaya. [Gaekwad's Oriental Series. 136]. Baroda 1961. p.2.2f: *abhyudayo brahmādilokeṣu iṣṭaśarīraprāptir anarthoparamaś ca / niḥśreyasam adhyātmano vaiśeṣikaguṇābhāvarūpo mokṣaḥ*.

<sup>(9)</sup> Walter Slaje, *ibid.*, p.168–169.

worldly action) and the supreme good. [89] The activity of engagement is said to be driven by desire in this world and the world beyond; but the activity of disengagement is said to be free of desire and motivated by knowledge. [90] The man who is thoroughly dedicated to the activity of engagement becomes equal to the gods; but the man who is dedicated to disengagement passes beyond the five elements.<sup>(10)</sup>

This passage tells us the dichotomy between the two activities. The one is that brings about the rise of happiness (*abhyudaya*), and another one is that brings about the supreme good (*naiṣṭhreyasa*). So we could easily find out here the dichotomy between worldly happiness and happiness beyond what is ordinary or worldly, that is to say extraterrestrial happiness.

In this dichotomy, the Sanskrit word “*abhyudaya*” means “worldly happiness” or “prosperity,” like wealth, fame and offspring. It is necessary to underline that the rebirth in the “heaven” too is contained into the “worldly happiness.”

The Sanskrit word “*naiṣṭhreyasa*” means “supreme good.” In the dictionary of the Sanskrit synonyms, *Amarakośa*, established 5th century A.D., as the synonyms of “*naiṣṭhreyasa*,” the following words are enumerated; *mukti* (freedom), *kaivalya* (perfect isolation), *nirvāṇa*, *amṛta* (immortal), *mokṣa* (salvation) and *apavarga* (accomplishment).

These synonymous words all indicate the same meaning: the complete

(10) *Manusmṛti* 12.88-90: *sukhābhyudayikam caiva naiṣṭhreyasikam eva ca / pravṛttam ca nivṛttam ca dvividhaṁ karma vaidikam // iha cāmutra vā kāmyaṁ pravṛttam karma kīrtiyate / niṣkāmaṁ jñātapūrvam tu nivṛttam upadiśyate // pravṛttam karma saṁsevyaṁ devānām eti sāmyatām // nivṛttam sevamānas tu bhūtāny atyeti pañca vai //* I use the translation in *The Laws of Manu*, with an introduction and notes, translated by Wendy Doniger with Brian K. Smith (Penguin Books 1991). pp.286-7.

and permanent freedom from transmigration (*saṃsāra*), and from the law of “*karma*” that regulate it. The Sanskrit word “*niḥśreyasa*” means literally that than which there is nothing better.<sup>(11)</sup>

Therefore, “*niḥśreyasa*” is the final goal of the human life.

4. I shall now treat these two words found in other texts. We could find out the dichotomy showed by the two words in *Manusmṛti*. Do they have always the same significance in other texts as in *Manusmṛti*?

#### 4.1 On “*abhyudaya*”:

The Sanskrit words “*abhyudaya*” cannot be found in any *Upaniṣads*. In *Manusmṛti*, the word “*abhyudaya*” is used 3 times.<sup>(12)</sup> Except one example that is mentioned above, the other two examples don't have the meaning “happiness.” It is noteworthy that the “*abhyudaya*” is used 4 times in *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*.<sup>(13)</sup> In all cases, the word “*abhyudaya*” is used with the Sanskrit word “*vyasana*” (calamity), for example, 1.2.11: “*vyasane abhyudaye ca*” (“in adversity or calamity and in prosperity”). *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* has a chapter concerning the topic of calamities (*vyasana*). In this chapter, the definition of “*vyasana*” (calamity) is showed; “*vyasyaty enam śreyasa iti vyasanam*” (“it throws out a person from his good, hence it is called *vyasana*”).<sup>(14)</sup>

In *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*, the word “*niḥśreyasa*” cannot be found, but the word “*śreyas*” which means “good” or “happiness” is found here only one time. Other examples of “*śreyas*” all mean “is better.” Then I conclude that in *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*, the word “*abhyudaya*” is used as

<sup>(11)</sup> Cf.F. Edgerton, *ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>(12)</sup> *Manusmṛti* 3.254; 9.84; 12.88.

<sup>(13)</sup> *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 1.2.11; 1.13.15; 9.5.26; 13.1.13.

<sup>(14)</sup> *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* 8.1.4.(=15.1.46). I use the translation of P.P.Kangle in *The Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra*, Part 2, p.385.

an antonym of “*vyasana*” (calamity), and it means “worldly happiness.” *Kauṭīlīya Arthaśāstra* is a book for teaching the kings the way of the life.

#### 4.2 On “*niḥśreyasa*”:

The Sanskrit word “*niḥśreyasa*” isn’t in *Kauṭīlīya Arthaśāstra*, as I just told about it now. In *Manusmṛti*, it is used 5 times.<sup>(15)</sup> Three examples of them are same phrases: *niḥśreyasakaram param*.<sup>(16)</sup> For example, *Manusmṛti* 12.83 is as follows:

The recitation of the Veda, inner heat, knowledge, the repression of the sensory powers, non-violence, and serving the guru bring about the supreme good.<sup>(17)</sup>

There is also an expression “*śreyaskara*.”<sup>(18)</sup> In this context, I cannot decide whether the words “*niḥśreyasa*” and “*śreyas*,” both of which mean “supreme good,” indicate definitely “*mokṣa*” or not.

In *Upaniṣads*, we can find out the word “*niḥśreyasa*” 4 times, but only in *Kausītaki-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*.<sup>(19)</sup> There, the word “*niḥśreyasa*” means “the best.” As I mentioned above, there is no example of the word “*abhyudaya*.” If the case is so, is there no idea of the dichotomy between two types of happiness in *Upaniṣads*? We know very famous dichotomy of “*śreyas*” and “*preyas*,” namely spiritual happiness and physical pleasure. *Katha-Upaniṣad* 2.1–2 tells us as the following:

<sup>(15)</sup> *Manusmṛti* 1.106; 1.117; 12.83; 12.104; 12.116.

<sup>(16)</sup> *Manusmṛti* 12.83; 12.104; 12.116.

<sup>(17)</sup> *Manusmṛti* 12.83: *vedābhyāsaś tapo jñānam indriyāṇāṃ ca saṃyamah / ahimsā gurusevā ca niḥśreyasakaram param* // I use the translation in *The Laws of Manu*, above-mentioned.

<sup>(18)</sup> *Manusmṛti* 7.88; 12.84; 12.86.

<sup>(19)</sup> *Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣad* 2.14; 3.2.



(Yama said): Different is the good (“*śreyas*”), and different, indeed, is the pleasant (“*preyas*”). These two, with different purposes, bind a man. Of these two, it is well for him who takes hold of the good (“*śreyas*”); but he who chooses the pleasant (“*preyas*”), fails of his aim. Both the good (“*śreyas*”) and the pleasant (“*preyas*”) approach a man. The wise man, pondering over them, discriminates. The wise chooses the good (“*śreyas*”) in preference to the pleasant (“*abhipreyas*”). The simple-minded, for the sake of worldly well-being (“*yogakṣema*”), prefers the pleasant.<sup>(20)</sup>

I suppose that the dichotomy showed in *Manusmṛti* might be originated from the *Upaniṣadic* idea like this.

5. Now, I would like to sum up the results of this investigation concerning to the idea of happiness in traditional Hinduism. The dichotomy between the worldly happiness and extraterrestrial happiness was certainly established in early *Upaniṣads*. But this dichotomy appears only when the two ideas are expressed in contrast by the two technical terms, “*śreyas*” and “*preyas*,” or “*nīḥśreyasa*” and “*abhyudaya*,” which constitute a pair of concepts. If we investigate the meanings of each term individually, we would understand the proper history of idea, which is expressed by each word.

“*abhyudaya*” is the word being in the Vedic tradition. It means essentially “prosperity in this world and the world beyond.” The typical mode of it is “new birth in ‘heaven’.” The contents of this word didn’t change at all even as times go by from the Vedic age to the age of Hinduism. There is, however, a devaluation of the idea, which is caused by the change of

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<sup>(20)</sup> Translation of S. Radhakrishnan, in *The Principal Upaniṣads*, pp.607–608.

the view of the world.

“*nīḥśreyasa*” means “supreme good.” In Hinduism, it is equivalent to the freedom from transmigration (*mokṣa*), because “*mokṣa*” is considered there as the final goal of the human life. But “*nīḥśreyasa*” means basically that than which there is nothing better. Therefore, it indicates the supreme good in general, which is admitted in different domains. For example, the attainment of heaven (*svargaprāpti*) is regarded as the accomplishment of *nīḥśreyasa* in the Vedic science, and the harvest in the economics. <sup>(21)</sup>

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<sup>(21)</sup> Cf. *Nyāyavārttika* of Udyotakara, in *Nyāyadarśana of Gautama*, Vol.1, ed. by A. Thakur, Mithila Institute Ser., Ancient Text 20. Darbhanga 1967, p.21.9–16.