

The Concept of AHIMSĀ in the ĀCĀRĀNGA

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Ahimsā is one of the basic principles of Jainism. The term *Ahimsā* has its origin in *himsā*, 'hisi' is its root, which means killing or hurting a living being. And the opposite of it, is non-killing, non-destroying or non-injury; that is *ahimsā*.¹ The concept of *Ahimsā* is clearly understood only by the analysis of the word *Himsā* which is defined as “*Pramattayogāt prāṇavyaparoṣaṇam himsā*.”² i. e. taking away the life or vital force of anyone under the influence of negligence or passions. This definition consists of two parts : (a) *Pramattayoga*, (b) *Prāṇavyaparoṣaṇa*. The former is the cause and later the effect. *Pramattayoga* means an activity tinged with attachment and aversion or an inadvertent activity. So *himsā* means destruction of *Prāṇas* resulting from *Pramāda*. Ācārya Amṛtacandra also says, that an injury whatsoever to the material or conscious vitalities caused through passionate activity of mind, body or speech is *himsā* assuredly.³

The ordinary definition of *himsā* is, no doubt destruction of life; but this definition is rather inexact. For destruction of life is not necessary a fault as it all depends upon the intention (*bhāvanā*) of the individual. If the *bhāvanā* is based upon *pramāda*, the destruction of life is *himsā* in the real sense of the word i. e., *dravya himsā* preceded by and based upon *bhāva himsā* and it is therefore a sin. But if the *bhāvanā* is not based upon *pramāda*, mere destruction of life is not *himsā*. It is the evil *bhāvanā* that makes *himsā* a sin.

Pramattayoga is invisible and subtle whereas *prāṇavyaparoṣaṇa* is visible and gross. The former is definitely a fault but the latter may or may not be a fault. The sinfulness of *pramāda* does not depend upon any other factor but itself; but in case of *prāṇavyaparoṣaṇa*, its sinfulness entirely depends upon another factor viz, *bhāvanā*. Truly speaking, *pramattayoga* alone is *himsā*, so it is undesirable and objectionable. So a question may be raised as to why *himsā* is not defined

1 Vacaspayam, Vol. 1, p. 582

2 Umāsvāti's Tattvārthasūtra, 7, 8

3 Amṛtacandra's Puruṣārthasiddhyupāya, 43



as *pramattayoga hiṃsā* and why the portion '*prāṇavyaparopāṇa*' is included in this definition. The answer is : It is not possible for masses immediately to refrain from *pramattayoga* to a great extent. On the other hand, mere destruction of life which is gross as compared with *pramattayoga* can easily be avoided, and such abstinence, too, is desirable. For, as this abstinence, even if unaccompanied by the giving up of *pramattayoga*, goes on increasing, it leads to more and more peace and prosperity of the masses.

Further, the development of *ahiṃsā* is due to the abstinence from *prāṇavyaparopāṇa*, which finally leads to the giving up of *pramattayoga*, so far as the masses are concerned. Consequently, though on a spiritual plane the abstinence from *pramattayoga* is the main thing, it is essential that while defining *hiṃsā*, the portion *prāṇavyaparopāṇa* should from a part and parcel of it so far as the life of the masses goes and this gross abstinence from destruction of life should be looked upon as *ahiṃsā*.

Ahiṃsā literally means not to kill or injure any living being or not to deprive one of one's life or not to torment any one, whereas *hiṃsā* means to kill living beings, *Hiṃsa* is done out of passions, (greed, pride, anger deceitfulness etc.) and carelessness, *Ahiṃsā* is to control one's self in such a way as not to be carried by passions and carelessness so as to kill or injure the living beings. It is said that everybody wants life and nobody wants to die, therefore, killing should be condemned for all kinds of living beings. This generous outlook leads to equanimity (*samatā*) i. e., control of passions towards all.¹

Ahiṃsā in its perfect form can be noticed only in Jainism. The entire Jaina religious and philosophical system is founded on *ahiṃsā*. Though the moral law '*na hiṃsyāt sarvabhūtāni*' (one should not cause injury to any living being) is accepted also in Brāhmanism and Buddhism, yet it is only in Jainism that the rule is universally applied and the entire life of its followers, both ascetics and householders is governed by this principle, which is observed fully or partially according to their status. It is said that the 'essence of all knowledge lies in non-killing which is the supreme principle declared by the omniscient.'²

Jainism preaches *ahiṃsā* towards all kinds of living beings, from one-sensed to the five-sensed ones. It recognises the sanctity of the lives of all beings and enjoins complete *ahiṃsā* towards all, in whatever state of existence they may be. It is on this basis that the doctrine of non-violence as preached in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* stands. It is said that 'no living being should be slain or treated with violence or abused or tormented or driven away.'³ Further it is said, 'No living being wants suffering just as I do not, thinking in this way, one who does not indulge in violence, nor does he let others to indulge in it, is a true monk.'⁴ It is said a '*Śramaṇa*' becomes a real *śramaṇa* only through *samatā*.⁵

Samatā is the basic principle on which Mahāvīra's message of non-violence is based. In the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* he has said, "You yourself are the being whom you intend to insult, you

- 1 Daśavaikālika Sūtra, 4, 9
- 2 Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra, 1, 1, 10
- 3 Ācārāṅga Sūtra, 1, 4, 1, 127
- 4 Anuyogadvāra Sūtra (Upakramādhikāra)
- 5 Uttarādhyayana Sūtra, 25, 32

yourself are the being whom you intend to persecute.”¹ It means that one should treat all living beings like one’s ownself. Bhagavāna Mahāvira says that “all those who say that all living beings should be slain, they should be asked, ‘Is pain pleasant to you or unpleasant?’ For all sort of living beings pain is unpleasant, disagreeable and greatly feared.”² For, all living beings have the same desires and aspiration as we have. It is further said, ‘if you look at exterior world from the analogy with your ownself, then you will never kill or destroy living beings viz., out of reciprocal regard.’³

The *Ācārāṅga* and the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* speak of *ahimsā* as the legitimate conclusions from the principle of reciprocity. “The Jaina attitude of *ahimsā* is logical outcome of their metaphysical theory of the potential equality of all souls and the recognition of the principle of reciprocity viz., as you do not wish to be killed, so others do not wish to be killed.”⁴ If everybody follows this principle of equality, one will easily get rid of the sin of *himsā* and will never commit any kind of violence. The *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* states that all beings are fond of life, like pleasure, hate pain, shun destruction and wish life i. e., long to live.⁵ It leads us beyond the feeling of duality which cause *himsā*. In the sense *Ahimsā* is equal to *Nirvāṇa*, because in *Nirvāṇa* also, all kinds of duality, selfishness and greed are extinguished.

The concept of non-violence in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* is all comprehensive. The idea of choosing lesser evil in preference to greater evil is not favourable with Mahāvira. In fact, there is no question of smaller or greater violence because all life is equal. In the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* it is clearly stated that killing for sport or any other reason does not benefit us in any way rather it increases enmity between different sects of creatures.⁶ Lord Vardhamāna insisted that one should not injure beings with a motive or without motive. Those who entertain cruel thoughts against the living beings, to them pleasures are dear. Therefore, they are near to death and far from liberation.⁷

The non-violence hardly takes into account the others against whom violence is used. It is immaterial whether those whom one hurts are small or great, criminal or innocent, loving or not. Non-violence is not a reaction to what others are or what others do. It is a state of one’s mind irrespective of what others are or what they speak or do. This state of mind cannot exclude new elemental life like that of earth, fire, air, water and vegetable from its scope. That is why the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* lays much emphasis on non-violence towards these one-sensed living beings. Bhagavāna Mahāvira has said that the earth-bodies, water-bodies, fire-bodies, wind-bodies, the lichens seeds and sprouts, animate beings are possessed of life, therefore, one should avoid injury to them.⁸

It is on this basis the Jainas call these six classes of beings (*Jīvas*). The earth-bodies etc.,

1 *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, 1, 5, 5, 165

2 *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, 1, 4, 2, 134

3 *Ibid*, 1, 3, 3, 116

4 Chatterji & Datta : *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, p. 122.

5 *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, 1, 2, 3, 81

6 *Ibid*, 1, 8, 2, 6

7 *Ibid* 1, 5, 1, 142

8 *Ibid* 1, 1, 12, 13



possess only one sense-organ, that of feeling, they have developed intellect and feelings but no limbs etc. Even in the mineral kingdom death is not unknown, which means that metals are also endowed with life. This is amply borne out by the scientific experiments conducted by Prof. J. C. Bose. The fact is that there is no life without consciousness, and no consciousness without life. Hence, where there is life, there is consciousness, whether it be fully manifested or not. Now because the soul is nothing other than consciousness, it further follows wherever there is life there is soul.

In the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* a lot of stress is laid on the abstention from injury towards these six kinds of beings. It has been repeatedly stated that he who injures these beings will be subjected to bondage, delusion, death and hell.¹ Here it is made clear that they have feeling though their feeling is not manifested. In order to elaborate this point, there is given the simile of a blind man who cannot see the wound as somebody strikes him. It does not mean that he has no feeling of pain but the point is that he cannot see it. Similar is the case with earth-bodies etc., which cannot express their feelings on being struck. So Jainism teaches that injury is sinful in relation to all and should be avoided as much in the case of small beings as in the case of big ones. The *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* has called that person as *Parijñātakarma muni* who does not act sinfully towards these six kinds of lives, nor causes others to act so, nor allows others to act so.²

The concept of *ahimsā* has two approaches i. e., (1) positive and (2) negative. Since *ahimsā* is a negative term, it means non-killing of living beings and the positive side of it emincipates protecting a living being, helping a living being and loving a living being is not connected with the moral principle of *ahimsā* and therefore has no value in itself. But this should be borne in mind that this positive aspect of *ahimsā* by way of loving each other is an exclusively important aspect of *ahimsā*. It is only in this sense that it is an indicator to the active life of the individual. *Ahimsā* in its real state, is both positive and negative. “*Ahimsā* is non-hate or absence of hatred, that is, in positive sense sympathy or love.” Absence of hatred, promotes love, which is the source of unification of different individuals. *Ahimsā* is incomplete without the positive counterpart based on love.

Ahimsā is a gigantic powerhouse of Jainism, for it permeates all walks and modes of life—of even the Jaina laity. It is this *ahimsā* that decides food, drink, dress etc., of the Jaina *śrāvakas* and *śrāvikās* so that they may not have to restrict their sphere of *ahimsā* to mankind only but can very well extend it to the vegetation and the like. For laymen this vow is technically called as *thūlapāñāvāyāo viramaṇam* which means abstinence from major violence. So, it makes an allowance for the mild violence unavoidable in household life. But intentional killing of living beings is actually denounced in this vow. Unintentional injury to living beings and killing or punishing of offensive creatures either to oneself or someone related to him is not a violence of this precept. It is presumed that a householder abstains from such violence himself, nor does he order somebody else to commit such violence either through mind, body or speech.³ But complete cessation from *Himsā* is prescribed for the Jaina clergy. It is technically called as ‘*Sabbāo Pāñāvāyāo Veramaṇam*’ i. e. complete abstinence from violence. The monks and nuns, since they stand on a higher spiritual platform can commit no act of

1 *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, 1, 1, 2, 12

2 *Ibid*, 1, 1, 7, 62

3 *Upāsakadaśāṅga Sūtra*, 1, 13



violence under any circumstances. They are supposed to observe this vow in a threefold way.¹ Complete cessation from *hiṃsā* is prescribed for monks and nuns not with a view to furnishing them with an ideal for an ideal sake but with the full understanding that this highest ideal can be so realised in the final and the highest stage of their life.

Ahimsā not only means abstaining from killing any living being but also abstinence from the egoistic feelings. Bhagawāna Mahāvīra taught us that one should realize one's complete identity with others. If someone is suffering, then others should feel that they themselves are suffering. It is this realization of absolute identity which can uproot one's ego, jealousy etc., which are solely responsible for violence.



To this world unattached
 And unattached to the world hereafter,
 Being chiselled or sandal—smeared
 Getting delicacies or suffering from hunger
 To be equanimous in such estermity.
 Is the mark of equanimity .

× × ×

In loss or gain, in pleasure or pain,
 In death or life, in fame or blame,
 In censure or praise.
 Equanimous remains
 A sage discreet.

1 Ācārāṅga Sūtra, 2, 15