

# TWO DEFINITIONS OF AHIMSA

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There are two different ideas of *ahimsā* in Indian thought. We may name them “Śramanic” and “Vedic”. The former is for instance mentioned by *Śāṅḍilya-Upaniṣad*.<sup>1</sup> It means not to cause suffering to any living being at any time either by mental, vocal or bodily activities. The Jainas, Buddhists and Yogins approve the idea of *ahimsā* in this sense. The point is that any intentional act causing harm or suffering to any living being is to be named as “*himsā*”. Therefore also *ahimsā* as a concept is applied to all living beings.

However, the moral tradition based on the originally Vedic sources is different. In the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* we find an important Vedic statement regarding the meaning of *ahimsā*. He who practises *ahimsā* towards all creatures, except at holy places (*tīrtha*), does not return to this world again.<sup>2</sup> “Holy places” refers here to the place of animal sacrifice.

Manu says that the *himsā* prescribed in the *Vedas* should be construed to mean *ahimsā*, because moral duties spring out from the *Vedas*.<sup>3</sup> This Vedic conception of non-violence appears in a clear form also in the *Mahābhārata*: the violence done to an evil-doer (*asādhu-himsā*) for maintaining worldly affairs (*loka-yātrā*) is *ahimsā*.<sup>4</sup> This appears to mean that “violence to an evil-doer” is bracketed into the concept of *ahimsā*.

The Vedic conception of *ahimsā* is hence not universal. It means “refraining from causing harm to a living being in the way not enjoined by the *Vedas*”. We can draw the (rather surprising) conclusion that according to the Vedic concept of *ahimsā* killing an enemy in a war, executing a criminal or killing an animal in a sacrifice are indeed all acts of “*ahimsā*” provided they are performed according to the commands of the authoritative scriptures.

Thus there are two different definitions of *ahimsā*. The term when used does not simply mean the same in all contexts. There are other differences of opinion also. The Vedic idea is motivated by social concern, whereas the śramanic idea refers to an individual motivation.

The Jainas have very laboriously dealt not only with *ahimsā* but also with the meaning of *himsā*. *Himsā*, to them, means the hurting of life-principles (*prāṇa-vyaparopāṇa*) due to the passionate activity (*pramatta-yoga*).<sup>5</sup> Another later

Jain text says that *hiṃsā* is any injury whatsoever to the material (*dravya*) or conscious vitalities (*bhāva-rūpa*) of life caused through passionate activity (*kaṣāya-yoga*).<sup>6</sup> Even when there is injury to life, it cannot be considered *hiṃsā* if the person is not motivated by any kind of passion and carefully follows the code of right conduct. On the other hand, if one acts out of ignorance motivated by passions, violence takes place irrespective of whether another being is killed or not.<sup>7</sup>

Further, some texts treat *ahiṃsā* as “internal purification”. A Jain text says that the absence of attachment (*rāga*) and other passions is *ahiṃsā*.<sup>8</sup> Renunciation of both types of possession, external (*bāhya*) as well as internal (*ābhyantara-aparigraha*), is also said to be *ahiṃsā*.<sup>9</sup> These references point out a concept of *ahiṃsā* in which purity of mind is the predominant moral characteristic.

Thus the śramanic or ascetic *ahiṃsā* differs from the Vedic concept of *ahiṃsā*. The supporters of the former have ardently opposed the Vedic idea of *ahiṃsā*. The *Yoga-Sāstra* by Hemacandra makes a covert reference to *Manusmṛti* and some other brahmaṇic writings as “*hiṃsā-śāstras*” (sciences of violence).<sup>10</sup> While referring to Manu and Jaimini, he acidly states that “these dulls, having given up the *dharma* based on restraint, morality and compassion meant for the welfare of the universe have declared even *hiṃsā* as a duty.<sup>11</sup> It is better to be a poor materialist (*cārvāka*) who is an open heretic rather than a demon in disguise like Jaimini, preaching the *Vedas*.<sup>12</sup>

However, the critics of the Vedic idea of *ahiṃsā* are not confined to Jainism. Also within the “orthodox” thought there are representatives of the śramanic ideas. The *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* opposes scriptural means sanctioned by the *Mīmāṃsā* system for terminating suffering only temporarily, and not completely either, because it involves impurity (*aviśuddhi*) in the form of *hiṃsā*, destruction of moral merit (*kṣaya*) and surpassability (*atīśaya*) in the result.<sup>13</sup> Impurity is ascribed to the killing of animals as well as the destruction of the living sprouts for purposes of completing sacrifices such as *soma* or others.<sup>14</sup>

A later but authentic commentator on the *Sāṃkhya-Sūtra* says that the scriptural means of the *Mīmāṃsā* are in truth equal to the wordly means because they are full of sin caused by *hiṃsā*, and the result is also only a temporary good (*vināśī-phala*), and is unequal to that experienced hereafter. The critic adds that there is no proof of limiting the scope of the general statement *na hiṃsyāt sarvā-bhūtāni* (not violating all the living beings).<sup>15</sup>

The above references demonstrate that the peak of criticism of the Vedic *ahiṃsā* is directed against the approval of exceptions to the universal principle. In this criticism the Jainas, Sāṃkhya, Yoga and the Buddhists appear to take the same side.

## References

1. *Śāṅḍilya-Upaniṣad* 1.1.
2. *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 8.15.1.
3. *Manusmṛti* 5.44
4. *Śānti-Parva* 15.49.
5. *Tattvārtha-Sūtra* 7.13. *Śrāvākācāra* by Amitagati 6.12.
6. *Puruṣārtha-Siddhyapāya* 3.43.
7. *Ibid*, 3.45-46.
8. *Ibid*, 3.44.
9. *Ibid*, 3.118.
10. *Yoga-Śāstra* 2.37, also ślokas 33-36.
11. *Ibid*, 2.40.
12. *Ibid*, 2.38.
13. *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* 2
14. Vācaspati Miśra on *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* 2
15. Vijñānabhikṣu on *Sāṃkhya-Sūtra* 1.6.

लेखसार

## अहिंसा की दो परिभाषायें

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भारतीय विचारधारा में अहिंसा के संबन्ध में दो प्रकार की विचार-धारायें-श्रमण और वैदिक-पाई जाती हैं। जैन, बौद्ध और योग के समान श्रमण विचारधारा में किसी भी प्राणी को मन, वचन और काम से किसी भी प्रकार के कष्ट न पहुँचाने की प्रवृत्ति और क्रिया को अहिंसा कहते हैं। इस धारा का स्रोत शांडिल्य उपनिषद् में पाया जाता है। वैदिक विचारधारा को छान्दोग्य-उपनिषद् में बताया गया है। इसके अनुसार तीर्थस्थानों को छोड़कर अन्यत्र अहिंसा का अभ्यास किया जाता है। मनुस्मृति और महाभारत में भी कहा गया है कि बुरा काम करनेवाले के प्रति की गई हिंसा भी अहिंसा का ही एक रूप है। अहिंसा के संबन्ध में यह वैदिक मान्यता सावर्भौमिक नहीं है। इसका कारण यह है कि यह मान्यता सामाजिक परिवेश से संबंधित है जबकि श्रमण-मान्यता व्यक्तिगत चरित्र पर आधारित है।

जैनों ने हिंसा-अहिंसा पर परिश्रमपूर्वक विचार किया है। उन्होंने इसे भाव-प्रधान माना है। यह अन्तरंग के शोधन का एक उपाय है। राग, द्वेष, परिग्रह (अन्तर्वाह्य) आदि के त्याग से अहिंसा प्रकट होती है। ये सब मानसिक प्रवृत्तियाँ हैं। फलतः जैनधर्म में मन की शुद्धता नैतिकता का प्रमुख लक्षण माना गया है।

जैनों ने वैदिक अहिंसा की मान्यता की काफी आलोचना की है। इसकी आलोचना सांख्य, योग और बौद्ध भी करते हैं। उनका कथन है कि 'न हिंस्यात् सर्वभूतानि' का कोई अपवाद नहीं होना चाहिये।