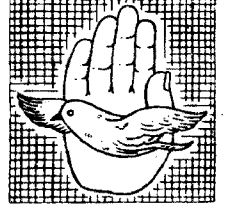


AHIMSA—A Psychological Study

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(I) Romain Rolland said 'Those who discovered the principle of Ahimsā are far greater than Napoleon or Wellington'. Gandhiji said that non-violence is the law of our species and violence is the law of the brutes. And Zimmer said that Ahimsā or non-violence is the first principle or Dharma of saints or sages by which they lift themselves out of the range of normal human beings to the higher state of self-realisation.

The Jainas have given the supreme importance to the principle of non-violence. '*Ahimsā paramodharmah*' is the cardinal principle of Jainism. In ancient Indian thought Ahimsā was the important principle of conduct. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chhāndogya Upaniṣads* one is advised to practise ahimsā and to develop qualities of self-discipline. Similar advice is given in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Patanjali emphasises the importance of ahimsā as an important *vrata* to be practised as psychological preparation.

(II) Himsā is the root of all evil. It should be avoided by all. And Ahimsā is the root of negative and positive virtues. Patanjali Yoga includes ahimsā along with four other *vratas* as necessary condition for the psychological background and the ethical preparation for the highest form of *yoga*, that is *samādhi*. Self-realisation would be possible if we first prepare the background for the ethical foundation of meditation. Ahimsā gives this background. A person who has moral strength can alone practise the higher forms of meditation. And that would be possible if moral foundation is strong. Practice of non-violence does help the development of personality towards self-realisation. It is therefore necessary to understand the implications of the concept of ahimsā for the proper appreciation of the psychological basis of the development of personality.

(III) Ahimsā is non-injury. It is abstaining from doing harm to any living being physically or mentally. The Jainas have analysed the concept of ahimsā on psychological and ethical bases. This is possible if we understand the nature of the life, both in the empirical and spiritual sense. All things are divided into living and non-living. The Jainas believe in the plurality of *jīvas* living individuals. The *jīvas* in the phenomenal world are classified on the basis of various principles like the status and the number of sense-organs etc. There is the vegetable kingdom; there are one-sensed organisms like the earth-bodied, water-bodied and the plants. The *trasajīvas* are the animal world. They have more than one sense, upto five sense-organs. The *jīvas* are possessed of *prāṇas*, life-forces. On the bases of the analyses of the living organisms and the life-force possessed by them, ahimsā is non-injury to any living being or a life-force of an individual being through the body, mind and speech and through three *karaṇas*, i. e., oneself doing injury, causing others to injury or to consenting to the act of injury. We are not to injure any living organism, however small it may be, or a life-force of the organism directly with our own hands, by causing someone to do so on our behalf or by giving consent to the act of injury caused by

others. Similarly we should not cause any injury to another person, we should not speak of causing injury to others nor should harbour any thought of injury to any living being.

Himsā has two aspects : psychic injury, *Bhāvahimsā* and physical injury, *dravyahimsā*. Physical injury refers to the physical harm done to any living being. But psychic himsā is concerned with entertaining thoughts of causing himsā to another being. Physical himsā is bad enough; but psychic himsā has greater intensity of causing evil conscience. It is more dreadful than physical himsā. For instance, there may be himsā sometimes but without any evil intention and inspite of our efforts to keep ourselves away from it. In such cases, it may not be considered as himsā to the extent to which the intensity of the injury would be considered evil if psychic accompaniment of himsā is involved. Harboursing illwill of doing harm to another being or even having an idea of causing harm to another is much worse than actually causing physical injury to a living being. Therefore psychic violence has to be condemned with equal emphasis as the physical violence.

The Jaina conception of ahimsā has been based on the scientific psychological notion of himsā. In the Tattvārtasūtra we read 'Pramattayogātpṛāṇavyaparopāṇam himsā'. Himsā is injury or violence caused to the living being due to carelessness and negligence and actuated by prejudice and other passions, like hatred. In the *Yāśastilaka* Somadeva defines himsā as injury caused to the living being through the error of judgment. He says 'Yat syāt pramādayogena pṛāṇisu pṛāṇa hāpanam himsā'. This has two elements : (i) injury to life, and (ii) motivation to cause injury. To injure another life is to cause pain to it. But, as we mentioned earlier, mere injury may not be characterised as himsā. It has to be considered with reference to motive and the disturbing emotion which characterise the fall of one's personality. Similarly himsā caused with the specific purpose like causing injury to animal for sport or for some gain will be himsā. In this the will or the saṅkalpa is a dominating factor. On the contrary, a careful and a pious man who is not disturbed by passions and who is kind towards animals will not suffer the sin of violence even if, by accident, injury is caused to any living being. Psychologically considered motivation and psychic accompaniments promoting the act of himsā may be considered the mental set. Thus, physical injury is himsā, but more important and harmful is the psychic condition of himsā. Speaking harsh and harbouring ill-feeling against a fellow being is also to be considered as himsā.

(IV) It has been suggested that the principle of ahimsā as moral principle has certain inherent limitations : (i) It is said that the practice of ahimsā is inconsistent with human nature, because man is not purely a rational being, but he has sensibility and he is governed by passions and impulses. The instinct of pugnacity is natural to man. It is in our blood to quarrel and fight. If we cannot fight in the modern set of the civilised world, we atleast take pleasure in witnessing fights like the bullfight and cockfight and the stunt pictures. There is a philosophy of war which says that wars are natural and necessary for the development of man and his society. To preach meekness and non-violence is against the very nature of man. Nietzsche condemn religion that preaches meekness as virtue, as it lowers the dignity of man. Non-violence promotes cowardice. The second objection to the practice of ahimsā is that it is impossible to practise ahimsā in its complete and real sense, as there are psychological and social limitations. Mrs. Stevenson said that the principle of ahimsā is scientifically impossible for a life motto, since it is contrary to the code of nature. Complete and unexceptional practice of ahimsā would be impossible in this, the human nature as it is. Except for the heaven-born prophets like the Buddha, Tirthankaras and Mahatma Gandhi, it is not possible for the average man to practise ahimsā fully.

These objections are not without significance. There is some truth in saying that animals including human beings do exhibit the instinct of pugnacity and they are not totally free from its influence. However, we should realise, as Kant the famous philosopher puts it, man is an autonomous creature. He is not merely governed by sensibility as other lower animals are, but he has reason also. Reason is the distinguishing feature of man. He knows that he is governed by animal-



nature, while the lower animals are not aware of this fact. This gives him a special ability and a special responsibility in the hierarchy of the world of life. He can transcend his lower nature and channelise his energies for a higher purpose. He can sublimate his instinctive energy. For instance, a man frustrated in love can sublimate his energy and channelise it for social service. Similarly abundant energy of man can be sublimated for struggling towards the betterment of humanity. In this sense we can interpret the lives and activities of great souls and social reformers. This does not mean that their activity is the result of frustration. They are supermen who have to be emulated by us. And in this sense, we can understand Gandhiji's statement that non-violence is the principle of man and violence is the principle of the brutes.

Yet Indian philosophers were aware of the limitation of the average human being in the practice of non-violence. They were also aware of the difficulty of common men to accept unqualified practice of ahimsā. The principle of ahimsā has to be fitted with the social structure that makes it possible to practise non-violence as far as possible and with the best motivations. Therefore the Jainasāstras presented the graded system of ethical rules. There is the higher code of conduct meant to be practised by the persons who have renounced this world and have become recluses. They have to practise the *vratas* to the highest degree of perfection possible. This is *muni-dharma* and the *vratas* are called *Mahāvratas*. The monks and nuns have to practise the *ahimsāvratas* most rigorously without exception to the extent humanly possible. But in the case of *Śrāvakas* (householders) a more liberal view is taken in giving instructions to the practice of ahimsā. This is *anuvrata*. In the *Ratnakaraṇḍasrāvakācāra*, the *Śrāvaka* is enjoined not to cause injury himself or be an agent for injury or appraise the act of injury knowingly and intentionally i.e. *saṃkalpāt*. He should be free from *stūlahimsā*. In the case of the citizen prohibition of himsā begins with two-sensed organisms, because it would be impossible for him to practise non-injury to one-sensed organisms intentionally or unintentionally in the conduct of his daily life. He is therefore, exempted from such restrictions. This is social ethics.

Even in the practice of non-violence by the citizen, certain forms of injury are permitted as exceptional cases. For instance, it is recognised as a duty of a *kṣatriya* to defend the weak even with arms. In the *Ādipurāṇa* there is a description that *Rṣabha*, the first Tirthankara gave training to his subjects in agriculture, in trade and in the use of arms. However, one is not to cause injury to living being wantonly and with malice and hatred. Do not hate the enemies. In the *Yaśstīlaka* Somadeva forbids a *kṣatriya* to indulge in indiscrete killing even in battle.

Here we are reminded of Gandhiji's words that violence is preferred to cowardice. He exhorted the Indian women to resist the *Goondās* (scoundrels etc.) even with violence, if necessary. He said, 'where there is choice between cowardice and violence, I would advice violence. Hence, it was I took part in the boer-war and the so-called Zulu rebellion and the late war.' But Gandhiji said that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence. It is the principle of courage. Forgiveness adorns the soldier. A coward has no moral strength to observe non-violence. A mouse hardly forgives a cat when it allows itself to be torn to pieces by her. For Gandhiji non-violence was a creed, but for lesser men it might be a policy.

(V) Non-violence is not mere non-injury in the negative sense. It has a positive content also. It implies the presence of cultivated and noble sentiments like kindness and compassion for all beings. Non-violence is love. It also implies self-sacrifice. The Buddha renounced the pleasures of the world out of compassion for all living creatures. Jesus was filled with compassion when he said 'whoever smite thee in the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' In the *Yaśstīlaka* Somadeva enumerates the qualities that should be cultivated to realise the ideal of ahimsā. The qualities are—(i) *maitrī*, (ii) *pramoda* (affection coupled with respect for men eminent for their virtues, (iii) *kāruṇya* (compassion) and (iv) *mādhyaṣṭha* (equitable attitude). Ahimsā is thus a positive virtue which resolves itself into spontaneous attitude of *jīva-dayā* in higher beings. For us, we have to carefully cultivate it.

We should also note that the ultimate end of the practice of ahimsā is not merely to save other souls but in a positive sense to save our own souls. Self-culture is the main problem in the practice of ahimsā. In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* it is said that if a person causes violence out of greed or if he supports such violence of others, he increases the enemies of his own soul. In the *Ācārāṅga-sūtra* we are asked to consider ourselves in the position of the persons or animals to whom we want to cause injury. Gandhiji said, 'I believe in loving my enemies. I believe in the power of suffering to melt the stoniest heart.'

Ahimsā is kindness, it is beneficial to the soul for its realisation of perfection. In ahimsā there is the force of the soul and in himsā there is the expression of our animal-nature. Ahimsā is beneficial to all, to the persons who practise ahimsā and to those who are saved by ahimsā. Ahimsā destroys all anxiety; disorder and cowardice. It can overcome and defeat the most cruel brute force. Gandhiji has shown this by the Satyāgraha movement against the mighty British empire. Zimmer says, 'Gandhiji's Satyāgraha is the battle waged in the colossal modern scale and according to the principles from the textbooks not of the Royal Military college, but of Brahman.'

The sun of Ahimsā (non-violence) carries all the hosts of darkness, such as hatred, anger, malice before himself. Ahimsā in education shines clear and far and can no more be hidden even as the sun cannot be hidden by any means.

—Mahatma Gandhi

