The Concept of AHIMŚĀ in the ĀCĀRĀNGA

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Ahimsā is one of the basic principles of Jainism. The term Ahimsā has its origin in hiṁsā, ‘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 ahimśā.¹ The concept of Ahimsā is clearly understood only by the analysis of the word Hiṁsā which is defined as “Pramattayogā prāṇavyaparopāyanah hiṁsā.”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) Prāṇavyaparopaya. The former is the cause and later the effect. Pramattayoga means an activity tinged with attachment and aversion or an inadvertent activity. So hiṁsā means destruction of Prāṇas resulting from Pramāda. Ācārya Amṛtacandra also says, that an injury weatsoever to the material or conscious vitalities caused through passionate activity of mind, body or speech is hiṁsā assuredly.³

The ordinary definition of hiṁsā 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 hiṁsā in the real sense of the word i.e., dravya hiṁsā preceded by and based upon bhāva hiṁsā and it is therefore a sin, But if the bhāvanā is not based upon pramāda, mere destruction of life is not hiṁsā. It is the evil bhāvanā that makes hiṁsā a sin.

Pramattayoga is invisible and subtle whereas prāṇavyaparopaya 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 prāṇavyaparopaya, its sinfulness entirely depends upon another factor viz, bhāvanā. Truly speaking, pramattayoga alone is hiṁsā, so it is undesirable and objectionable. So a question may be raised as to why hiṁsā is not defined

1 Vacaspati, Vol. 1, p. 582
2 Umāsvāti’s Tattvārthasūtra, 7, 8
3 Amṛtacandra’s Puruṣārthasiddhyapāya, 43
as pramattayoga hīṁsā and why the portion ‘prāṇavyaropana’ 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 ahīṁsā is due to the abstinence from prāṇavyaropana, 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 hīṁsā, the portion prāṇavyaropana 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 ahīṁsā.

Ahīṁsā 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 hīṁsā means to kill living beings, Hīṁsa is done out of passions, (greed, pride, anger deceitfulness etc..) and carelessness, Ahīṁsā 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

Ahīṁsā in its perfect form can be noticed only in Jainism. The entire Jaina religious and philosophical system is founded on ahīṁsā. Though the moral law ‘na hīṁsyāt sarvabhūtāni’ (one should not cause injury to any living being) is accepted also in Brähmanism 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 ahīṁsā 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 ahīṁsā 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 donot, 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 Mahāvira’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 Daśāvaitalika Sūtra, 4, 9
2 Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra, 1, 1, 10
3 Ācārāṅga Sūtra, 1, 4, 1, 127
4 Anuyogadvāra Sūtra (Upakramādhikāra)
5 Uttarādhikāya Sūtra, 25, 32
The concept of Ahimsa in the Acaranga

The Acaranga and the Sutrakritanga speak of ahimsa as the legitimate conclusions from the principle of reciprocity. The Jaina attitude of ahimsa 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. If everybody follows this principle of equality, one will easily get rid of the sin of himsa and will never commit any kind of violence. The Acaranga Sutra states that all beings are fond of life, like pleasure, hate pain, shun destruction and wish life i.e., long to live. It leads us beyond the feeling of duality which cause himsa. In the sense Ahimsa is equal to Nirvana, because in Nirvana also, all kinds of duality, selfishness and greed are extinguished.

The concept of non-violence in the Acaranga Sutra is all comprehensive. The idea of choosing lesser evil in preference to greater evil is not favourable with Mahavira. In fact, there is no question of smaller or greater violence because all life is equal. In the Acaranga Sutra 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. Lord Vardhamana 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.

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 Acaranga Sutra lays much emphasis on non-violence towards these one-sensed living beings. Bhagavana Mahavira 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.

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

1 Acaranga Sutra, 1, 5, 5, 165
2 Acaranga Sutra, 1, 4, 2, 134
3 Ibid, 1, 3, 3, 116
4 Chatterji & Datta: An Introduction to Indian Philosophy, p. 122.
5 Acaranga Sutra, 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. 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 Pariṇāta-karma 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 emancipates 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 śravakas 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 thulapāṇāvāyāyo viramanam 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 Hīṁsā is prescribed for the Jaina clergy. It is technically called as ‘Sabbhāvo Pāṇāvāyāyo Veramanam’ 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. Complete cessation from *ahimsā* 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.

*Ahiṃsā* 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.

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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 extremity.
Is the mark of equanimity.

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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.

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1 *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, 2, 15