

Jain Concept of Ahimsa

Dr. P.M. UPADHYE

Jainism is one of the important ancient faiths in Indian context particular and in world context in general. There are many principles ethical, metaphysical and philosophical in Jainism and there lies one pertinent cardinal principle of Ahimsā in the philosophical thought of Jainism. In fact, ahimsā is the soul of Jainism; bereft of it, Jainism has no existence.

The general meaning of the word Ahimsā means—harmless abstaining from killing, or giving pain to others in thought or deed, the policy or practice of refraining from the use of violence, as in reaction to oppressive authority.¹ It also means a doctrine of non-injury to all living beings² In a way, 'ahimsā' is an ethical principle applicable to all living beings and in practice, it would mean abstaining from animal food, relinquishing war, rejecting all thoughts of taking life, regarding all living beings akin.³ With these meaning of the term Ahimsā, in our mind, we will certainly find out the Jain concept of Ahimsā embraces all of them and also extends the limit of Ahimsā so that it has been accepted as one of the important principles of Jainism. All the Jain canonical works, biographies of Jain saints and sevants, Jain purāṇas, do proclaim the Ahimsā principle in letter and spirit.⁴

According to Jainism, monks and laymen are to follow five great vows and minor vows respectively and the first vow is the Ahimsā, as given in the Jain canonical literature. Vows are to be followed life long. Great vows are unconditional but they are reduced for laymen to their abstaining from offences against live matter leading to death etc. Gross offence against any living being,¹³ understood by fettering, beating, wounding, overloading, disregarding the urge of appeasing one's hunger and quenching one's thirst, all this most probably with a view to domestic animals. Such a practice of 'ahimsā' is of a positive nature not negative as it is wrongly understood. Jainism does not stop here. It goes one step further. Jainism advocates Ahimsā to be followed directly as well as indirectly. In other words—monks, and laymen or followers of Jainism are to renounce himsā or forbidden activity so far as it consists in one's actively causing it. They should not do it, or cause others to do it, or give consent to others to do it, they should not do it mentally, physically as well as by speech. (vide Uvāsagadasāo-etc). This is indeed a noble principle of Ahimsā preached in Jainism.

It has an ethical side. This principle of Ahimsā asks for preservation of life in any form or shape. This also speaks for reverence towards life as Albert Schweitzer has put it, by which the realm of life was

1. See Apte's Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Random House, Dictionary of the English Language.
2. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol. I, page 231.
3. Vide Dictionary of Philosophy, page 8.
4. Āyāranga 1-4-2 Sūyagadāṅga 1-11, Nāyādhamma Kahāo, Uvāsaga dasā-o, Uttaradhyayana Sutra, Dasaveyāliya etc.

so immeasurably extended, permeates the discipline of Mahavīras order in a way no other ethical prescription does.¹

This is in brief the concept of Ahimsa in Jainism.

It may be mentioned that in the Patanjali Yoga. (2.30), there is an important place of Ahimsā in the list of five 'Yamas'. According to Gautama dharma Sūtra, ahimsā is one of the ātma-saṁskāra and it is one of the means of Salvation. Will Durant says that according to Jains, the road to release was by ascetic penances and complete Ahimsā.² Even Mahatma Gandhi had been strongly influenced by this Jain concept of Ahimsā which he accepted as the basis of his policy and life.

Even the Buddhism accepts Ahimsā as one of the cardinal principles. The Mahabharata speaks highly of Ahimsā³ Manu, a great social philosopher does not forget to mention Ahimsā as one of the virtues⁴. This doctrine of non-injury to all living beings finds expression in a mystical passage in Chandogyopaniṣad. (3-17), where five ethical qualities, one being 'ahimsā', are said to be equivalent to a part of sacrifice of which the whole life of man is made an epitome.

Jainism accepted the non-injury doctrine and made it a leading tenet of their school.

The Jain concept of Ahimsā is quite positive, and it is useful for the social development. From individual point of view, it is a social virtue as well as individual one so that there would be peace in society. In today's context of world tension, fear of war, hatred towards each other, Ahimsā as understood by Jains is an essential factor to bring about peace and sane social order in the world.

Thus, Jain concept of Ahimsā is a great contribution to Indian thought in particular and world thought in particular for the purpose of bringing about sane social order and world peace.

राष्ट्र की रक्षा के लिए ऐसा कोई कार्य नहीं है जो जैनी न कर सकता हो। जैनियों के पुराण तो युद्धों से भरे पड़े हैं; और उन युद्धों में अच्छे-अच्छे अणुव्रतियों ने भी भाग लिया है।
पद्मपुराण में लड़ाई पर जाते हुए क्षत्रियों के वर्णन में निम्नलिखित श्लोक ध्यान देने योग्य हैं :—
सम्यग्दर्शनसम्पन्नः शूरः कश्चिदणुव्रती ।
पृष्ठतो वीक्ष्यते पत्न्या पुरस्त्रिदशकन्यया ॥
किसी सम्यग्दृष्टि और अणुव्रती सिपाही को पीछे से पत्नी और सामने से देव कन्याएं देख रही है।
स्वामी रामभक्त के लेख 'जैनधर्म में अहिंसा' से उद्धृत
वर्णी—अभिनन्दन-ग्रन्थ पृ० सं १३१

1. Vide. The Doctrines of the Jainas, by Walther Schubring, page 301.
2. The Story of Civilisation-Vol. I, page 421.
3. Śāntiparva-(340-89).
4. Manusmṛiti 5-44-48.