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 Śaṅgītya-Upaniṣad. 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. “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. 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-yastrā) is ahimsā. 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. Himśā, to them, means the hurting of life-principles (prāṇa-uyaparopanya) due to the passionate activity (pramatta-yoga). Another later
Jain text says that *hiṃsā* is any injury whatsoever to the material (*dravya*) or conscious vitalities (*bhaava-rūpa*) of life caused through passionate activity (*kaśāya-yoga*). 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.

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

Thus the śramanic or ascetic *ahimsā* differs from the Vedic concept of *ahimsā*. The supporters of the former have ardently opposed the Vedic idea of *ahimsā*. The *Yoga-Sūtra* by Hemacandra makes a covert reference to *Manusmrīti* and some other brahmanic writings as “*hiṃsā-lātras*” (sciences of violence).

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.” It is better to be a poor materialist (*cārvaka*) who is an open heretic rather than a demon in disguise like Jaimini, preaching the *Vedas*.

However, the critics of the Vedic idea of *ahimsā* are not confined to Jainism. Also within the “orthodox” thought there are representatives of the śramanic ideas. The *Śāmkhya-Kārikā* opposes scriptural means sanctioned by the *Mīmāṁsā* system for terminating suffering only temporarily, and not completely either, because it involves impurity (*avīśuddhi*) in the form of *hiṃsā*, destruction of moral merit (*kṣaya*) and surpassability (*ātiśaya*) in the result.

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.

A later but authentic commentator on the *Śāmkhya-Sūtra* says that the scriptural means of the *Mīmāṁsā* are in truth equal to the worldly means because they are full of sin caused by *hiṃsā*, and the result is also only a temporary good (*vināśi-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 sarvābhūtānti* (not violating all the living beings).

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

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References

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2. Chāndogya-Upaniṣad 8.15.1.
3. Manusmṛti 5.44
4. Śānti-Parva 15.49.
6. Puruṣārtha-Siddhyapāya 3.43.
8. Ibid, 3.44.
10. Yoga-Sāstra 2.37, also ślokas 33-36.
11. Ibid, 2.40.
12. Ibid, 2.38.
13. Sāṁkhya-Kārika 2
14. Vācaspati Miśra on Sāṁkhya-Kārika 2
15. Vījñānabhinīkṣu on Sāṁkhya-Sūtra 1.6.

लेखसार

अहिंसा की दो परिभाषायें

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भारतीय विचारचर्या में अहिंसा के संबंध में दो प्रकार की विचार-धाराएँ-भ्रमण ओर बैद्यक-पाई जाती हैं। जैन, बौद्ध ओर योग के समान भ्रमण विचारचर्या में किसी भी प्राणी को मन, वचन ओर काम शक से किसी भी प्रकार के कष्ट न पहुँचाने की प्रवृत्ति ओर क्रिया के अहिंसा कहते हैं। इस धारा का स्तोत्र शांतिहय उपनिषद में पाया जाता है। बैद्यक विचारचर्या का भ्रमण-उपनिषद में व्यक्त गया है। इसके मनुस्मृति ओर महाभारत में भी कहा गया है कि बुरा काम करनेवाले के प्रति की गई अहिंसा भी अहिंसा का ही एक रूप है। अहिंसा के संबंध में यह बैद्यक मान्यता सांख्यी-भौतिक नहीं है। इसका कारण यह है कि यह मान्यता सामाजिक परिवेश से संबंधित है जबकि भ्रमण-मान्यता व्यक्तिगत चरित्र पर आधारित है।

जैनों ने हिंसा-अहिंसा पर परिमार्जनक विचार किया है। उन्होंने इसे भाव-प्रवाह माना है। यह अन्तरंग के शोषण का एक उपयोग है। राम, भेद, परिरह (अन्तर्विष्ट) आदि के त्याग से अहिंसा प्रत्य गत होती है। वे सब नानासिक प्रकृतियाँ हैं। फलते: जैनधरम में मन की चुदाता सैतिकता का प्रमुख लक्षण माना गया है।

जैनों ने बैद्यक अहिंसा की मान्यता की काफी आलोचना की है। इसकी आलोचना सांख्य, योग ओर बौद्ध भी करते हैं। उनका कथन है कि 'न हिंस्यातु सर्वभूतानि' का कोई अवश्य नहीं होना चाहिये।

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