
VIOLENCE IN MODERN SOCIETY AND JAINISM - A REMEDIAL RELEVANCE

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In the sixth century B.C. North-Eastern India witnessed a remarkable religious revolution which profoundly influenced the course of Indian history. It was in some respects a reaction against the cumbersome rituals and bloody sacrifices which in those days constituted the essence of the vedic religion.¹

Two revolutionary missions, Jainism and Buddhism were breakaways from the vedic religion and its offshoots, though in a sense they had grown out of it. There was a time when Jainism was popular both in North and South India and patronized by many great kings of great repute including Chandragupta Maurya. It is probably the most significant ancient ascetic tradition of subcontinent, with its heavy emphasis upon self-denial, renunciation and austerities.²

Talking about Jainism, Vardhamana Mahavira 24th Tirthankara of the Jains and a great benefactor of the humanity, was born in 599 B.C. in Bihar. Jainism placed great emphasis on three jewels (Triratna) : right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. Lord Mahavira defined the conduct as observing five virtues - Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (Truth), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmcharya (celibancy) and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness). Other religions also describe these five virtues but 'Ahimsa' finds pride of a place in Jainism.³

The Ahimstic way of life is the sure panacea for all moral, social, economic and political ills. Ahimsa is the highest religion and where there is Ahimsa, there is victory.⁴

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¹ History of India by Anil Chandra Banerjee, P. 55

² History of Ancient India by Dr. A.C. Arora, P. 117

³ Bhagwan Mahavir-Jiwan, Darshan ewm Shikshainye, edited by Dr. Pradeep Sharma'Snehi P. 80

⁴ Religion and culture of Jains by Dr. Jyoti Prasad Jain, P. 10

The principle of 'Ahimsa' is the backbone and focal point which aims at the welfare of all living things, not only human. Thus Jainism is a religion of compassion, universal love and amity. Acharanga defines and describes the philosophy of Ahimsa beautifully while Purusartha Siddhi Upaya by Amrta Candra proves that all the ethical tenets of Jainism are derived from Ahimsa. In Jainism non-violence is the pivot on which its whole ethics revolves. For Jains Violence represents all the vices and non violence represents all the virtues. In Prasnavyakarana-Sutra the term non-violence is equated with sixty virtuous qualities just as peace, harmony, welfare, trust and fearlessness.⁵

Samata or equanimity is a personal or inner aspect of our religious life, when it is applied in social life or it is practiced outwardly it becomes non-violence. This is pure, eternal and unchangeable law or the tenet of religion.⁶

According to Jain thinkers violence is of four kinds - (i) Deliberate or aggressive violence i.e. intentional killing, (ii) Protective violence i.e. resorting to violence to save the life of one's own or his fellow being or to ensure peace and justice in the society, (iii) Occupational violence i.e. the violence which one commits in his occupation such as farming, tilling the soil or running factory or industry, (iv) Violence which is involved in performing daily routine work of a house holder such as bathing, cooking, walking etc.

The first form of violence which is deliberate, is to be shunned by all, so it is obligatory for all to be non violent in this sphere. The other forms of violence involved in daily routine work are inexistible but this does not mean that the ideal of non violence is not practicable and so it is not necessary for human race.⁷

The modern style of living and rapidly growing materialism has led to the erosion in the moral fabric of society. As a result, false hood,

⁵ Prasnavyakarana Sutra, 2/1/21

⁶ Acharanga Sutra, 2/4/127

⁷ Tattvartha Sutra 5/21

dishonesty, corruption, immorality have penetrated deep into our psyche. Wrongful deals, black marketing, profiteering, adulteration and tax evasion have become the order of the day in business and industry. Good conduct fellow-feeling, morality and humanity are becoming a thing of past.⁸

The basic problems of present society are mental tensions, violence and the conflicts of ideologies and faith. Jainism tried to solve these problems of mankind through the three basic tenets of non violence (Ahimsa), non-attachment (aparigraha) and non-absolutism (anekanta). If mankind observes these three principles, peace and harmony can certainly be established in the world.⁹

In modern society, we are living in an age of nuclear weapons and due to this, the existences of human race is in danger. It is cruel irony of fate that we find the present world more complex, dangerous and accentuated with international terrorism especially after Taliban attacked on World Trade Centre and Pentagon in USA on Sep.11, 2001. Tension on the Indo-Pak and Indo-China borders is the surmounting day by day. Even communal riots are also seen in some parts of India. With the advancement of scientific research and technological development, man has discovered horrible and most deadly weapons ever heard before. Jainism principles have great and more relevance today than ever before. Jainism offered the theme 'Live and let live'. It taught that weapons are in no way an effective answer to weapons. The path of Ahimsa or peace remains unsurpassed. It is only the firm faith in observance of non-violence which can survive the human race. It is mutual credibility and belief in the equality of human beings which can restore the peace and harmony in modern society.¹⁰

Terrorism implies disguised acts of violence. Terrorism can be for meeting economic, religious or racial objectives. Violence begets

⁸ Bhagwan Mahavir-Jiwan, Darshan ewm Shikshainye edited by Dr. Pradeep Sharma Snehi, P. 80

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bhagwan Mahavir-Jiwan, Darshan ewm Shikshainye edited by Dr. Pradeep Sharma Snehi, P. 82-83

violence. Nobody can win lasting peace by use of force. The China's President while visiting, the USA, presented the book, 'How to win war without fighting' by Lo Tse, to George Bush. In our own country Mahatama Gandhi was the great practitioner of Ahimsa and achieved independence for India using Ahimsa as his weapon. In fact he used the concept of Ahimsa in social transformation rather than spiritual purification. In the views of Mahatama Gandhi, no religion has ever emphasized Ahimsa in the world as Jains. If the principle of non-violence will be remembered, the name of swami Mahavir will come first in this world.¹¹

The relevance of non-violence is not only in the field of outer world but it is also relevant in our day to day life.

The Jain food is based on the practice of this doctrine i.e. minimizing ahimsa. Thus plant based or strict vegetarian food as much natural form as possible is the recommended constituents of Jain diet. According to Jainism food which involves killing of mobile living beings e.g. meat and eggs and their products; honey, food grains and cooked foods infested with moth/mildew and micro organism are non edible. Food involves killing of large number of stationery e.g. root vegetables like onion, garlic, potatoes and food which induces laziness or are toxic in nature e.g. alcohol, tobacco, opium, heroin etc are non edible in the views of Jains.¹²

Jainism prohibits not only killing of human beings and animals but of the vegetable kingdom also. To hurt the plant is also an act of violence. Deforestation (for our industry or for our own use) is also an act of violence because it asserts harmful impact on environment. The Dasavaikalika mentions that everyone wants to live or not to die.¹³

Jainism prohibits abortion of an unwanted child, a girl child etc. because of the principle of non-violence. As there are possibilities of

¹¹ Ibid P. 16

¹² Achranga Sutra 2/11/127

¹³ Dasavaikalika Sutra 6/10

life to be born the killing of that life is high leveled violence equal to killing a human being. Abortion is prohibited as Jains believe that life starts at conception. Jain texts advocate restraint in sexual activities and celibacy. Some Jains use modern methods of contraception with regret.

Organ transplant is common these days. But according to Jainism, organ transplant is allowed provided the donor is not harmed. Here a story may be explained. Five pound infant baby face was given a heart transplant of seven month old female baboon by Dr. Leonard Baily of Loma Linda University in California. Baby survived only 21 days. Animal rights group protested against the use of baboon of organ factories. Jaina view is very clear here that life of baboon is equally precious as the life of baby and this will be an act of murder, violation of the principle of non-violence.¹⁴

Harmful, harsh, untrue, unnecessary, unpleasant and offensive speech is also violence. Skilful use of language is a sacred skill. Mahavira insisted that we must understand others fully before we speak. Language can express only our spoken words. All human actions must be friendly, compassionate and unaggressive. Jainism's principle of non-violence is unconditional love to all beings.¹⁵

In the view of Jains, taking food after sun set is an act of non-violence. Jitubhai Shah, director of the L.D. Institute of indology in Ahmedabad, India says the reason Jains do not normally eat or drink anything after sundown is because it is believed that doing so would cause the death of minute micro organism that emerge in the dark. Jains cover their mouths with a muslim cloth so that they would not accidentally or unintentionally swallow or harm any insects or germs while eating or breathing air. The entire life style is geared towards causing least harm

¹⁴ Quoted from Dr. Shifegan Chand Jain's Paper

¹⁵ Bhagwan Mahavir - Jiwan, Darshan ewm Shikshainye edited by Dr. Pradeep Sharma Snehi P. 83.

to other creatures. One can begin doing this by opting for products and practices in which minimum violence is involved.¹⁶

To be killed or committing suicide are vehemently refuted by Jainism as both are highest levels of violence. In the busy life of today, people lose their temper very easily. Domestic violence is perhaps one of these causes. Women are misbehaved by their families and atrocities are done on them by family members. Jainism does not discriminate the human beings on the basis of their caste, creed, colour or sex. Non violence is nothing but to treat all living beings as equal.¹⁷

After seeing the relevance of Jainism principles, the U.N. declared Mahavir's 26th Birth centenary year as International Non violence and Welfare year in 2001. The then Prime Minister of India Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpai also announced 100 crore rupees to be spent for the welfare of the people on this occasion.

In conclusion, we can say, Jainism's teachings are logical, scientific and if followed properly lead to the path of peace, blissfulness and spiritual liberation. It fits very well in the modern society and advocates a way of life that promotes the friendship and brotherhood to all and malice to none. In modern society Jain philosophy of Ahimsa has considerable influence.

Thus Jainism's principles have made valuable contribution in every branch of learning and could help solve each and every problem of society.

¹⁶ View of Jitubhai Shah

¹⁷ Bhagwan Mahavir - Jiwan, Darshan ewm Shikshainye edited by Dr. Pradeep Sharma Snehi P. 67