



Ahinsa is Essential for Survival of Humanism

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Abstract

Ahinsa is an ancient Sanskrit word and originally meant only non-killing. It must have come into existence as a reaction to killing and as a response to a feeling of distaste and repugnance to the act of killing fellow human beings. In Yoga, Ahinsa gathered a lot of connotation and came to mean 'non-injury' to others by thought word or deed. In Jainism, Ahinsa or non-injury in Manasa, Vachana and Karmana, including negative abstention from inflicting positive injury to any being as well as positive help to any suffering creature.

Apart from the connotations the world gathered in the course of its use through when Gandhi began to use it deeper the world – 'Non-Violence'. Both the words through negative inform, have developed positive meanings and are identified with sympathy, love, identification with the other, service, suffering and sacrifice for the other which we adopt an attitude of Ahinsa. Once Gandhiji proposed that, Ahinsa is the purest kind of love. Thus in the present context Ahinsa means an attitude of constructive love to all, with a view to the good and all-sided development, Sarvodaya of the whole of Humanism.

By Survival of humanism 'I do not mean mere survival for the sake of survival, here survival is not of much value if it does not lend itself to the progressive expansion and elevation of the human consciousness, culminating in blissful illumination of the highest order. I have used the words 'Survival of Humanism' as the background today is one of a universal apprehension of human extinction is the wake of a nuclear holocaust, which is the logical result of the suicidal policy, man, is following.

Key Words: Ahinsa, Survival of humanism,

If we cast even a casual and cursory glance and survey the prehistory, protohistory and history of mankind for the past millennia, we shall find that it is through long periods of peace, through loving friendliness and cooperation, that man has been able to build the present great civilization, attain the high levels of culture in the various parts of the world and develop extraordinary skills in works and highly efficient organization. This achievement is observable both in individual and as well as corporate existence and civic living. Few thousand years ago approx fifteen thousand according to different speculative historians were cave dwellers, headhunters, scattered over in various localities and always in search of food and shelters. And today we are billion settled in huts; hamlets and heavenly mansions all over the many continents, a few flying like birds with the spreads like supersonic, communicating with each other as we are next door neighbours, whole of humanity into a single family of man vishwa kutumba, the dream and insight of the ancient Vedic Rishis of India.

At the top of all the achievements is the sincere and heartfelt attempt to share the cares and anxieties, the fears and hopes the apprehensions and optimisms of peoples across oceans and continents through global organization UNO, UNESCO, WHO, FAO and ILO in which people deliberate collectively and try to find out common remedies for ills common to humanism as a whole.

To the Vedic Rishis, the sun was the symbol of all power and the source of not only all life but also of all consciousness and intelligence. They invoked in their congregational prayer the sun-god; savita; to inspire and guide them. They declared that there is only one truth, one being, one god as - Ekam sad vipra, Bahudha Badanti.¹ To them the whole universe was one family – “Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam”. Desireless, self-possessed, immortal, self-proved, everfull of Bliss, inferior to none, ever-young and everlasting is he, the soul of this universe; through his knowledge alone can one spurn death – “Tamera Vidvan no bibhaya mrtyor atmanam dharam ajarmyuvanam.”² The highest state of matter is therefore life. Through matter cannot account for life yet there can be no life without matter.³

The five great vows (Panca-maha-vratas) as they are described, for example in the yoga-sutras are Ahinsa, Satya, Astya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraham. The caturyama samvara of Parsva included non-injury, truth, non-stealing and non-possession. It may be noted that the Buddhist account of the caturyama Samvara appears confused as it speaks of restraint in the use of cold water, evil, sin and ease on account of purification of sin.⁴ Mahavira added celibacy as the fifth vow and thus the Panca-maha-vratas of the jains came to be identical with those mentioned by Patanjali. Thus the Acaramgam⁵ describe the first mahavrata as Panaivayao veramanam and details its five bhavanas and goes on to mention the other mahavrata implying avoidance of musavaya, adimadana, mehuna and pariggaha and similarly describes the five bhavanas for each. In Jainism Ahinsa or non-injury in Mansa, Vacha and Karmana including negative abstention from inflicting positive injury to any being as well as positive help to any suffering creature.⁶ Among the Buddhists the Pancasilas include desisting from destroying life, from stealing, from telling lies, from wrong sexual conduct and from drinking intoxicating liquors. These becomes the eight fold sila⁷ if one adds to it not eating unseasonable food at nights, not wearing garlands or use of perfumes and sleeping on a mat spread on the ground. These again become the tensilas⁸ by adding abstention from dancing, music and stage, and abstention from the use of gold and silver. The Brahmanical mendicant was similarly required to abstain from causing injury to living, beings, lying, misappropriation incontinence and niggardliness.⁹

It is hardly necessary to point out that there is a basic identify in the broad conception of ascetic life among the Buddhists, the Jainas and the Brahmanical Dharmasutras. Vyasa in his commentary on the yoga-sutras says that Ahinsa is the chief vow and quotes an ancient Sankhya tradition to the effect that it is for the perfection of Ahinsa that the other vows are undertaken.¹⁰ A similar view of the matter may be easily discerned in Buddhist and Jaina literature. Aryadev declares that the Buddhas describes dharma compendiously as Ahinsa.¹¹ Akalanka says- 'Ahinsasyah pradhama tradadau tadvacanam.'¹²

Respect for life and total avoidance of violence is fundamental to ascetic life. Violence presupposes egoism cupidity, intolerance, lack of self-restraint, ignorance of the nature of living beings and often fraud and treachery. On the other hand, the total avoidance of violence is not possible without self-control, giving up of egoistic claims and ambitions, recognition of the similarity of self and another cultivation of wantlessness. Similarity victory in war was one of those things which the Vedic Aryans frequently prayed for. Yojna-dharma and Ksattra-dharma both legitimized violence and were part of the system of varnasramdharma. The emergence of emphasis on non-violence in sramanism and its gradual adoption in Indian culture meant a profound revolution in Indian ethos by accenting the feminine virtues.¹³

The doctrine of Ahinsa starts from a perception of the sameness of life, the equality of all souls. This was accepted by the vedic rishis also, but as part of the ultimate metaphysical realization which had its truth at a level other than that of common social life which rests on the cooperation of differences rather than on an abstract sameness of Brahman (nirdosam his samam Brahma) is a matter for inward realization. What made the doctrine of Ahinsa imperative for the sramanas was the belief in the transmigration of the soul which linked the lowliest forms of life with the highest in one interacting chain of being. The Jainas, indeed, held that even the four material elements are inhabited by the souls which are thus ubiquitous and turn any careless action into a form of violence.¹⁴

Long before Jainism – this holds Ahinsa as the highest religion and duty". Ahinsa Parmodharma" – there was what was called the Sraman culture which gave high value of non-killing. The Buddha through the army of missionaries, 'the Bhickus whom he created, preached not merely negative non-killing but the positive aspects – Karuna (compassion) and Maṭtri (friendliness). He taught the conquest of anger by non-anger, hatred by love and his teaching spread over a great part of the world behind the borders of the India. Jesus, the Christ was the prince of peace, love; faith and charity are the fundamental of Christianity. Islam means peace and very common greetings mean peace-sallam.¹⁵

The urges of evolution are already there but now it is time that man participates in evolution towards higher and nobler levels of conscious existence, of creative peace, ascending symphonic harmony and universal joy and happiness of all which was the dream as well as the ideal of Gandhi. Once when Gandhiji was proposed to adopt the word love and Ahinsa, he said that though Ahinsa is the purest kind of love: Love never claims, it ever gives, love never suffers, never resents, never revenge itself. Thus, in the present context Ahinsa means an attitude of constructive love to all, with a view to the good and all-sided development, Sarvodya of the whole of Humanism.¹⁶ Ahinsa in this context would mean not the passive, dormant and occasional expression of the great and noble and self-denying emotion of love, but that cultivated and well-nourished culture in which every activity of the physical, vital, intellectual, aesthetic; moral and

spiritual energy of human being is inform and instinct with love and over flows to reach through identification every being on earth.

It is true that Gandhi gave Ahinsa its shape and form by not merely preaching but by scrupulously practicing it throughout his eventful life and finally sealing its authenticity by his own martyrdom. But he often said that the principles he stood for and culture he embodied was both as old as the hills. Even so, he added something to the principles and that was the method, the manner and the detailed technique of making the principles operative. That something was 'Satyagrah', adherence to truth at the cost of one's life but with love in once heart for even the wrong doer and the aggressor. This does not mean, that as against peace there have been no wars, against attempts to build there have been no disastrous destructions, as against love and friendliness, there has been no hatred and utter enmity, as against co-operation there has been no obstructive activity and as against attempts to established harmony and happiness there have been no jealous and murderous activities to spread poison and misery. But the point is inspite of the negative and anti-forces, the positive forces evolution have been able to make headway and kind all in the doubting mind of man a flame hope for future.

I know that Ahinsa is a rare expression, it not a new one. But in view of the critical and dangerous phase of evolution through which man is passing, it needs to be made not only current but also popular. Today violence overt or covert, open or secret, on all levels, individuals, social group national and international is obviously playing havoc and embittering all human relations. Self is narrow and parochial sense; self-interest in terms of possessions and or power is dominant as against all other interests, exploitative injustice and constructive violence as that of the haves and have-nots is the rule rather than an exception. Hegemonies ambitions, arms race; piling up of atomic weaponry notwithstanding the wariness that atomic weapons are not defensive and atomic wars are unwinnable' the total annual military budgets bulging too many billions, are all portents of a global magnitude. If man at this critical juncture fails to mobilize his spiritual resources, his commitment to truth and love for all and neglects to utilize his rational faculties, there would not be any other opportunity, since humanism wailed itself have disappeared, Gandhi with his unerring instinct and intuition in this matter pledged himself to truth and non-violence (Ahinsa).¹⁷

Man today is in transition. He is at that cross roads. He has travelled for enough from the beast that he was and has been, towards manhood on his way to God hood, if that word can signify a very high level of superior truth-conscious existence. He has tried hard to probe into the mysterious powers of matter and harnessed atomic energy. The tragedy is that today he is a slave of his ambitions for power, and is utilizing science and technology in addition to their other uses for human comfort and convenience for the purpose of domination over his brethren. No amount of sophistication talk of one's own defense, balance of power and terror, treaties salt I and II can hide or camouflage the naked fact of the danger in which humanism finds itself today. Gandhi is not alone in calling halt to this madness and advising human beings to take to the path of love and friendliness. It was not he who wrote to constitution of the United Nations organization. World without war was a call given by the war-lords and significant sculpture in front of the building of the UNO of the sward to be beaten into a plough share, is a representation of the great saying in the Bible.¹⁸

No other name is greater than that of Einstein in the modern world of science; he says for Gandhi – “Scarcely would people believe that a man called Gandhi in flesh and blood walked on this earth. He regretted that his own discoveries in science were utilized for logging atomic weapons of mass destruction. Dr. Robert Oppenheimer who was responsible for making the first fissionable atomic bomb in USA wrote relenting in his diary about the bomb, that it was born for the annihilation of the world. After the explosion of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, he too is gone alone with the qualms of conscience which ought to move the hearts of scientists and technologists to desist from participating in the murderous game which politicians play with impurity and that too in the name of the people and their nations.¹⁹

Let us now listen to a living top physicist Fritjof Capra the author of ‘The Tao of Physics’. The most tragic thing that has happened to modern science and technology as well as to political science is that they are innocent of all moral considerations, which really are the very bedrock of human society and individual behavior and mutually beneficial relationship. Quantum Physics and the quest of the last particle has led scientists to his conclusion that the world of matter as well as of life and consciousness is one integral organic whole in which every other particle in the universe, be it of so called inert matter, of breathing life or knowing thinking feeling consciousness. He calls for a radically different social and moral order, so that real harmony and happiness can result for humanism as a whole. The Survival of the whole of humanism or human civilization may depend on whether we can bring about such a change, so that we can experience the wholeness of Ahinsa nature and learn the art of living with it in harmony and happiness.

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