CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In course of the evolution of man and his culture, human groups have always had to face sporadic outbursts of organized violence. Yet, civilization has continued to develop through periods of war and peace. A disturbed period in society's existence as a result of war, the vagaries of nature, famine and pestilence, is normally followed by a period when equilibrium is restored, a period described as peace. The process of the movement of society from one state of peace to another, spurred by the intervention of institutionalized violence, has been made into a social philosophy by a number of adverse consequences to the self-image of man, his conception of social order and the institution of peace and nonviolence. Men have succumbed to its implication and developed an attitude which regards violence as fatally inevitable. The institution of war is thus not only associated with a stoic attitude and sense of heroism, but it also becomes an institution of respectability at par with social reforms or other processes of positive social selection.

The impetus to such pseudo-philosophies was provided from time to time by a number of false concepts and assumptions. A purely philosophical notion like "dialectics" was interpreted and extended to cover all aspects of inter-group violence; the inevitability of war was posited in the war-group violence; the inevitability of war was posited in the war-instinct of man and his urge for bellicosity and power; justification for war was found in the irrational nature of man which due to its inherent urge for the brutal and the ruthless was considered to result from having broken loose from the bonds of culture, culture being treated as mere repression of the former. Attempts were also made to explain the phenomenon of war through the biological law of "selection" which in terms of social consequences means "struggle for existence," coercive adaptation and survival of the fittest. Sorokin has rightly said that "there are authors who talk of the struggle for existence among atoms, planets, stars and molecules, not to mention the struggle of organisms, human beings and societies."

The underlying attitude in almost all explanations of war, arising from the

theory of sin or theory of instinct, universal law of conflict and imminent dialectics, or any other theory is that of rationalization and not of scientific or comparative analysis. To a large extent these theories suffered all along from the methodological limitations of the contemporary sciences which interpreted all social processes from a monistic or particularistic point of view. The categories employed for the explanation of social reality have always been delimited by the cultural development of contemporary society. From this point of view, it would be easy to understand that the socio-cultural experiences of the intellectuals of the past, of which a continuum is provided by the priest-magician, on the one hand, and the modern scientist, on the other, suffered from certain limitations. Some of these limitations were (1) an attempt to discover the final cause of social phenomena which led to monism; (2) the tendency on the part of thinkers to arrive at a general law without adequate facts—which led to the fallacy of socio-cultural determinism and inevitability of a certain course of history and social processes; (3) the ethnocentrism of the social analyst, who suffered from parochialism in regard to values and culture norms, thereby converting science into ideology; (4) the lack of empirical tradition in social sciences, leading to a top heavy superstructure of speculative and deductive theory but a very weak and meager substructure of facts, rendering the findings unreliable and subject to counter-interpretation; and finally (5) the overpowering preconception or faith in absolute values and norms which reinforced the tendency towards monistic explanation thus preventing a focus on cultural relativism ushered in by the 20th century social sciences.2

These limitations can easily be discerned in the writings of all the thinkers who take for granted the inevitability of war. If one classifies the theories of war on the basis of their categorial emphasis one discovers in them such elements as wrath of the Divine, "the evil and irrational nature of man"; "instinct or the innate disposition of man"; law of nature for survival of the fittest, constituting various explanations of war. The theories which have directly or indirectly supported this line of thought have persisted since the beginning of the human social thought. There have been philosophers and prophets, who from time to time, broke away from this line of thinking, either by completely refuting the logico-deductive structure of such theories of war and violence or by introducing modifications through new interpretations. All

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through the traditions of human society the rethinking about the causes of war remained neglected for sociological as well as historical reasons. In a sociological sense, war means a social crisis and an experience of a collective emotional trauma which shakes so violently the subjective and emotional universe of humanity that its lasting impressions far exceed the impressions of peace and non-violence. Peace by its very nature signifies a state of equilibrium. It signifies a condition of almost a relationship between the established norms and actual behavior, the personality level it signifies a harmony among the various subjective goals of the ego and at the societal level among the mutual goals of the individuals and groups, where computability and not contradiction is the overbearing mode of relationship. It is, therefore, quite natural that literature on the exploits and causes of war often succeed in building up a deep-rooted stereotype or fixation in the collective consciousness of man that war is inevitable, or that it results from the essential ingredients of human nature. Consequently the persistent tradition of peace and non-violence which in fact has had a longer duration in human history than war leaves such a faint impression in our mind in regard to its stability that one has to be specially reminded to become aware of its historical significance.3

From a historical point of view, the persistence of a war psychology among men emanates from an entirely different source. It is related to the continuity of a certain world view of man in which dissension and not consensus is treated as the integral process governing social phenomena. It may not be related to social philosophy is much as the condition of society and the level of its internal growth. The balance of relationship between war and peace in the psychology of men is to a marked degree dependent upon the nature of social development, and technological and cultural advancement. It is one of our hypotheses that human society had never in the past achieved that state of internal differentiation, structural complexity and cultural growth in which the philosophy of peace as a value system could be sustained for a long time as the governing principle of its social order. Human civilization in the past had made many prodigious achievements in the cultural field, such as, in architecture, in philosophy, in theological speculations and literature; but these developments were segmental to the society viewed as a whole. Their impact on the whole community of men was very limited indeed. This limitation may be attributed

3 Ibid
to the slow advancement in science and technology and the poor system of communication and the existence of a closed group-hierarchy and scales of prestige in traditional societies, etc., which rendered the diffusion of norms and values slow and segmental. Consequently many enunciations of the theory of peace and non-violence in the past, right from the peace movements of the Ancient to Gandhi, have remained disparate in regard to its impact on society, and social policy. People’s response to these peace movements have not altogether been unmixed with a sense of scepticism and disbelief. Could one say that it was because, the institutional substructure of contemporary society, in which these philosophies were nourished and propagated, lagged much behind the requirements of the normative system called for in the teachings of these philosophers and saints? In other words, were these thinkers and philosophers much ahead of their time? This raises a basic question in the realm of the sociology of values.

The question whether the failure of earlier peace movements in the traditions of various civilizations was the result of social-psychological or historical factors may be a matter of controversy, but the fact remains that the memory of the masses and the impressions and images about war are much stronger than those of peace and non-violence. This phenomenon leads to some methodological limitations in any study of the tradition of non-violence. The sources from which the tradition of peace and non-violence is derived, very often contradict themselves; on the one hand, there are eulogies of war and of war-heroes and on the other non-violence is accorded the status of a supreme principle of ethics. Similarly, one also finds that in the history of many civilizations the periods of war have far surpassed the periods of peace and peaceful social reconstruction. All these facts lead to a valid question. Has there been a tradition of non-violence in the Indian tradition.

An understanding of the nature and meaning of tradition, on the one hand, and that of “Non-violence” on the other is a pre-requisite for offering satisfactory answers of the above questions. What is the meaning of tradition in the context of tradition of non-violence? The question assumes significance since the tradition of non-violence or peace as an integral whole has probably never existed in the historical life-cycle of various civilizations. By integral tradition is meant the total normative systems and sanctions that constitute the composite tradition. Non-violence often appears as a part-tradition within the tradition per se. In this form, however, non-violence has existed
throughout the history of mankind.

There is a diversity of views in regard to the meaning of tradition. Three types of conceptions of tradition are common in social thought, viz., the religious, the metaphysical, and the sociological. Non-violence as a tradition is best sustained from a sociological definition of tradition, rather than religious or metaphysical. From a religious point of view tradition is integral perennial and finite. It does not mean that it is static. It changes, but the changes have their limits. It is determined, both in regard to evolution and involution, since it lies in the revelation of the divine principles. All norms and values are drawn from the divinities and each transformation of social phenomena in the course of growth and development constitutes the processes of, by and large, an apotheosis. In India the term Sanatan (perennial) expresses this perpetual character as also the rigidity of the traditional norms. Since the tradition is a given category, it cannot be changed and innovations are ruled out. Only interpretations are possible. Even a distinction between the sacred and the secular or between the religious and the utilitarian norms and behavior as made by various social thinkers is rendered illogical from this conception of tradition. All life and all activities are manifestations of the divine principle hence sacred.

The metaphysical theory of tradition is best expostulated in the idealistic philosophies of both the East and the West. In this interpretation of tradition the structure of norms and institutions that go to constitute traditions are transcendental and teleological. The element of transcendence is not spiritual or religious but categorical and logical. As evident from the works of Plato these categories have an integral character in the sense that they constitute a unity which is organic and not nationalistic. In this way, tradition is placed both above and beyond the individual consciousness. Unlike the religious conception of tradition, the metaphysical point of view rules out the place of divine will as the mechanism of change in tradition. On the other hand, it explains all changes in tradition axiomatically through the principles immanent within the tradition itself.

Though different in basic assumptions in regard to the nature source of tradition both the theological and the metaphysical conceptions share a number of common features. Both rule out the existential or social bases, and derive tradition

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from a source which is transcendental in nature; both have teleological principles
implicit in the processes of growth or movement in tradition; both treat traditions as
organic or integral wholes endowed with a central meaning or ethos. Despite these
similarities, the differences are also significant. The theological conception derives all
the above characteristics from the theistic worldview, whereas the metaphysical
conception emerges from a rationalistic, often mechanistic and aesthetic world view.
Besides, there are differences in the interpretation of the nature and mode of change in
tradition itself and the possibility of synthesis and growth.

These two meanings of tradition raise certain methodological issues which
need some examination. The first one is the relationship between a single aspect of
the normative system of the tradition (in our case non-violence) and the central ethos
of the tradition as a whole. If a whole cultural tradition is described as Apollonian or
Faustian, or Ideational, Idealistic and Sensate, etc., in terms of its dominant system
of meanings or symbolism (which Spongier calls soul) or in terms of its mode of
integration (as mentioned by Sorokin) the problem arises as to whether a strand of
nonnative system in every tradition which emphasizes the tradition of non-violence
and peace without constituting the dominant pattern of the tradition as such, could be
described as the tradition of non-violence? This problem arises more seriously in the
context of idealistic and religious theories of tradition, such as those of Spongier, and
Schuon where the tradition is characterized as an organism, the constituent parts of
which, howsoever diversified and heterogenous cannot be isolated because of their
essential “inward unity.”

It is at this point that a departure can be made for the explanation of the
sociological meaning of tradition, the sense in which the validity of the formulation
called “tradition of non-violence” can be justified. Sociologically, tradition as the sum
total of values, norms, beliefs and habits, etc., signifies the processes of continuity and
conservation. Tradition is not a static but dynamic integrative principle which subsists
as a bridge between the past heritage of man and his selectively persisting culture,
constantly in a process of assimilation. In this form the dichotomy between tradition
and modernity would be greater, it would be of a methodological nature rather than
substantive. The continuity of tradition docs not, however, means its ephimerality or

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transience. Tradition is a “social fact” and as such it has both the qualities of fact, viz.,
exteriority and constraint as mentioned by Emile Durkheim.\(^7\) No single individual
represents the whole tradition, although as modern studies in national character have
shown any single member of the culture may represent the basic characteristics of the
tradition. In this sense tradition is not confined to the individual subjective experience
or consciousness; it outcrosses and goes beyond it. It is to emphasize this aspect of
tradition and culture that Stark writes in his ‘Fundamental Forms of Social Thought’
that culture is not dependent upon man, it can even outlive man and leave behind a
part of the tradition that once existed and pulsed with activity, in the form of ruins
and monuments.\(^8\) Since tradition exists as a reality \textit{sui generis}, as it were, its
exteriority or non-subjectivity works as a force upon human beings; it constrains their
action and imposes itself upon them. It is thus that tradition exists as a mechanism of
social control as well as social survival. In this process communication and its media
(especially language) play a predominant role. Language is a very clear example of
the independence of tradition, its syncretism and growth.

Another feature of the sociological concept of tradition is that it is not treated
as something transcendental and a priori to the condition of human society. The laws
governing the changes in tradition are not immanent and pre-existent but the results of
social interaction, communication and contact. This process of contact takes place
through individuals and their socialization, training and learning. It is through this
mechanism that tradition conserves itself as well as adapts to the emerging forces of
change. Tradition as an integral reality is independent of individuals but it expresses
itself through them; this oppression may be of a recurrent or repetitive nature or
adaptive and dynamic. Yet another feature of tradition, from a sociological point of
view, is the recognition of levels and ramifications within its body-structure. These
levels and ramifications co-exist along with the hierarchy of social groups, their
conditions of life and mode of work and existence. Thus, within the framework of the
tradition per se there are constant processes in operation consisting of smaller units of
normative systems which reciprocally interact with a certain degree of independence.
But they exist within the overall framework of the tradition. Anthropologists like

\(^8\) Stark, W., The Fundamental Forms of Social Thought, New Delhi, Tata Mc Graw Hill Publishing
Robert Redfield\textsuperscript{9} and McKim Marriot\textsuperscript{10} have generalized this in terms of “great tradition” and “little tradition”. The former stands for the tradition of elites and the latter for that of the masses, which constantly interacts with mutual circulation of norms, forms of style, values and behavioral patterns. Thus, tradition in sociological sense is a reality dependent upon the existential condition of society, its basic system of needs and the superstructure of institutions. As a corollary, the elements of tradition inducting the system of norms, values, behavioral patterns and whole style of life are intimately related to the socio-cultural and environmental condition of the society itself. Fundamental norms of society are, therefore, neither a priori forms pre-existing at transcendental plane as the idealistic viewpoint holds, nor, are they revelations from the divine. On the other hand, they are handed down by tradition which itself is a product of the society of man and his human condition.

Two major points emerge from the above discussion. First, that a tradition may have its tributaries and sub-systems having a certain degree of freedom and specificity. This specificity will, of course, be circumscribed by the degree of inconsistency or consistency that the sub-system has with the tradition per se. Secondly, that the dominant symbolism and the normative structure of tradition is not a construction but a reality which can be scientifically studied as well as correlated with the existential bases of society. Consequently, it is possible by scientific methods to understand the mechanism or the structure and function of tradition; through this understanding it is also possible, within a certain range of probability, to bring about changes in tradition. It is for this reason that the sociological concept of tradition offers the nearest approach to the proper understanding of the tradition of non-violence.

The tradition of non-violence would, therefore, connote the persistence of the norms of non-violence in the organic structure of various traditions as their dominant pattern or as secondary attributes, as the case may be. It is assumed that no tradition in the world existed or could exist from a sociological point of view entirely on violence. It is not only a functional requirement of society but also a psychological need of individuals to perceive the community of men in terms of the sphere of activity into at least two opposite groups, viz., “in-group” and “out-group” or “we” and “they”. If this

social phenomenon is the basis of group prejudices and social disharmony which may result in sporadic violence, it is also the first social psychological mechanism to introject the value of harmony and non-violence. Man has first to survive and establish an *esprit de corps* within his “in-group” before he takes up arms against the “out-group”. In this sense the tradition of non-violence is a primordial reality of social life. What remains for investigation is the pattern and form that it has taken in various traditions or civilizations from time to time, the manifestation of its norms and the nature of its universality or specificity in the social life of man.

But what is non-violence? Does the meaning associated with this concept lend itself to a fair degree of homogeneity so as to render comparisons worthwhile and reliable? Does not the conception of non-violence differ from culture to culture? Or within the same culture at different epochs of cultural recrudescence? Is it not a fact that one civilization embraces, within the sphere of non-violence, the whole range of cosmic phenomena (Hindu, Buddhism and Jain) and another confines it only to fellow human beings with various qualifications and yet a third limits it only to the nearest kith and kin (tribal)?

**ETYMOLOGICAL MEANING AS PHYSICAL NON-INJURY**

A. Rigveda

It is often wrongly assumed that the etymological meaning of ahimsa is 'non-killing'.

In the Rigveda Indra is invoked so that the chantings may not be harmful to god Indra himself.\(^{11}\) The forefathers are prayed to not to harm the devotee on account of any wrong that might have been committed by the latter against them. *Mitra* is described as non-injuring (*ahimsana*) god. Fire-god *Agni* is described as unharmed (*ahimsyamana*) himself.\(^ {12}\) In all the above references the verb *hims* is used in the sense of physical injury.

In the Rigveda another verb, from *han*, is commonly used in the sense of killing. *Indra* and *Soma* are prayed to for slaying wicked persons. *Soma* destroys the evil *Rakhsas*. Soma is prayed to as a destroyer of untruth. *Indra* is the slayer of thieves

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\(^{11}\) Rigveda, 10.22.13.  
\(^{12}\) Ibid. 1. 141.5.
(dasyu) He slays the Rakhsas. He should kill even those who have unnecessarily and wickedly blamed the devotee. For protection the god Rudra is invoked that he may not slay the devotee's relatives and the devotee himself.

The above references bear out the fact that the meaning of the verb hims was not limited to killing. Rather the primary meaning was physical injury which might in extreme cases result in death. Consequently, the etymological meaning of ahimsa is not ‘non-killing’, but ‘physical non-injury’.

Some other Vedic sources

One may, furthermore, take notice of the fact that the first reference to ahimsa as a noun in Vedic liberating may be found in the Taittiryay Samhita in which ahimsa is used in the sense of non-injury to the sacrificer himself.

In the Satapatha-Brahmana ahimsa is used as a noun, as it has been said 'the womb does not injure the child and the womb remains uninjured (ahimsa). Ahimsa as a noun is also used to connote the safety of either kinsmen or human beings in general. The term praja is used in three senses:

(a) one’s own kinsmen, (b) human beings in general and (c) subjects of a kingdom. Since this reference occurs in the context of a devotee it may well indicate one’s own kinsmen. At any rate there is no clear indication that ahimsa is used here in a moral sense.

Moreover, the sacrificer prays to god Agni to be easily accessible to him so that the sacrificer may not injure (hims) the fire. Here again ahimsa as a noun appears in the sense of non-injury. In another samhita-text ahimsa as a noun is used in the sense of one’s own protection.

T.W. Rhys David’s claims that ahimsa is used for the first time as a noun in the Chandogya-Upanisad3.17.4.; the date of this document may be the 7th century B.C. While the accuracy of this statement is doubtful, one can at least say that ahimsa seems to have been used in the Chandogya-Upanisad in a moral sense, i.e.

13 Ibid. 7.104.19 and 7.104.7.
14 Satapatha-Brahmana, 6.3.1.26.
being extended to all living beings (*sarva-bhuta*) with certain exceptions. The first reference to ahimsa in a moral sense may be found in *Kapishala-Katha Samhita*. There the non-killing of animals (*pasu-ahimsa*) is referred to in the context of sacrifice. This reference is pre-upanisadic.

**THE POPULAR MEANING: AS ‘NON-KILLING’**

Manu like many others, uses the word himsa sometimes in the sense of ‘killing’ and the term himsra as ‘killer’. The popular meaning of himsa is killing a living being. A commentator upon Manusmrta refers to the depredations and other violent activities of the wild animals as killing (*himsa*) which causes the separation of life (*prana*, ‘vital air’) from the body of others.

If the popular meaning of himsa is ‘killing’, one may say that the popular meaning of ahimsa is ‘non-killing a living being’. It appears, however, that in the *Dharmasastras* and *Puranas* the word himsa is more often used in the sense of ‘killing’ than ahimsa in the sense of ‘non-killing’. Therefore, the relative frequency of himsa in the sense of ‘killing’ does not establish that ahimsa is equally often used in the popular sense of ‘non-killing’.

The Jains also sometimes understand ahimsa in the sense of ‘non-killing’. The wise mention ahimsa as abstention from killing gross beings, i.e. not killing mobile beings. This is the popular sense of ahimsa in Jainism.

**VEDIC CONCEPTION OF HIMSA**

Besides ‘killing’, himsa has many other meanings. One may note that Manu uses it in the specific sense of ‘cutting down medical trees’, which is one of the minor crimes. In another context himsa is referred to as ‘destroying knowingly or unknowingly the properties (*dravya*) of another, which requires a compensation to be paid to the owner of the property as well as the payment of a fine to the king. Himsa means also injury to other harmless beings (*ahimsaka*) just for the sake of one's own pleasure (*atma-sukha-iccha*) or simply 'hurting innocent beings'. Besides, it means ‘to speak ill’ (*durukta-bhdsana*), as demonstrated by the proverb ‘he killed her by his
words’, and ‘doing against’ (praii-kulacarana) the wishes of parents and teachers.

In the Mahabharata it is said that when an avaricious king oppresses his subjects foolishly by levying undue tax (asdstara-drsta-kara), he does injury (himsa) to his own self (atmanah).\textsuperscript{20}

According to the Jabaladarsana-Upanisad real himsa is himsa committed physically (kaya), mentally (manas) or vocally (vac), which is against the Vedic injunctions (veda-akta).\textsuperscript{21}

A modern standard Sanskrit dictionary, which has orthodox leanings, describes himsa as beating (ghata), stealing (cauryya), tying up (bandhana), destruction of livelihood (vrtti-nasa), intimidation (trasa) and killing (hadha). But if one kills a being who intends to kill, there is no sin (dosa).

The above references demonstrate that the term himsa has been used by Manu and other writers in various meanings. It is not difficult to conclude what they all seem to imply. To them only that type of injury is himsa proper which is against the Vedic injunction; this can be named as ‘the Vedic sense of himsa’.

**VEDIC CONCEPTION OF AHIMSA**

In the Chondogya-Upanisad one finds an important Vedic statement regarding the meaning of ahimsa. He who practices ahimsa towards all creatures, except at holy places (tirtha), does not return to this world again.\textsuperscript{22} ‘Holy place’ refers to the place of animal sacrifice. Thus killing for sacrificial purposes was not considered to be morally wrong.

Himsa, and likewise ahimsa, are used in various meanings. To mention a couple of examples: Medhatithi, commenting on Manu, refers to ahimsa as ‘non-bearing’ of a student by a teacher. Kulluka explains in the same context that ahimsa means ‘non-tying of a student by a rope’ and ‘non-bearing by a bamboo’. In the Mahabharata a soldier is advised to be non-violent towards the property of a Brahmin.

Manu says that throughout one’s life a twice-born (belonging to the three

\textsuperscript{20} Santi-Parva, 71.15.
\textsuperscript{21} Jabaladar Sana-Upanisad 1.7.
\textsuperscript{22} Chondogya-Upanisad, 8.15.1.
higher castes) and considerate man should not perform any type of himsa which is not prescribed in the Vedas (aveda-vihua) even at the time of distress. Manu adds that the himsa prescribed in the Vedas should be construed to mean ahimsa because moral duties spring out from the Vedas. Some commentators like Sarvajna-narayana take Vedic himsa to include ahimsa: but to Medhatithi, Vedic himsa is morally equal to ahimsa in the sense that both produce the same good result.

This Vedic conception of non-violence appears also in the Mahabharata: the violence done to an evil-doer (asadhu-himsa) for maintaining worldly affairs (loka-yatra) is ahimsa. This appears to mean that Violence to an ‘evil-doer’ is bracketed in the concept of ahimsa.

Moreover, killing of animals has a Vedic sanction in the preparation of madhuparka (a mixture of honey, curd and meat), in Vedic sacrifices (yajna) and in offerings made to one's forefathers as well as gods. This inclusion of Vedic himsa into the notion of non-violence may be explained by the idea that if God (Isvara) has directed man to do good and evil (sddhu-asddhu). The moral responsibility for the result goes to God. If, for example, a man cuts off a tree in a forest with an axe, the possible sin is incurred by the one who falls tree and not by the axe.

One Sanskrit dictionary gives three meanings of the word ahimsa: (1) abstention from causing pain (pida) to others by speech, mind, body; (2) relieving living beings: from pain and (3) refraining from causing pain to a living being (pranin) in the way not enjoined by the sastras. The last of the three meanings contains a reference to the inclusion of the Vedic himsa into the concept of ahimsa.

The Vedic conception of ahimsa is prevalent in the early Upanishad, in legal literature, very frequently also in the other Dharmasastras, Puranas, as a matter of commonplace in the Mimamsa school of thought and even in Samkara’s writings.

ASCETIC CONCEPTION OF HIMSA & AHIMSA

The Jain have very laboriously dealt not only with ahimsa but also with the meanings of himsa. Himsa, to them, means the hurting of life-principles (pranavyaparopana) due to the passionate activity (pramatta-yoga) Another later Jain text

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23 Santi-Parva, 32.13.
says that himsa is any injury whatsoever to the material (dravya) or conscious vitalities (bhava-rupa) of life caused through passionate activity (kasaya-yoga). Even when there is injury to life, it cannot be considered himsa if the person is not motivated by any kind of passion (raga) 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. Both internal (antaramga) and external attachments (bahiramga-samga) are said to be a form of himsa.

ASCETIC CONCEPTION OF AHIMSA

_Sandiliya-Upanisad_ which has yogic leanings mentions ahimsa as one of ten yamas or observances. It means not to cause suffering to any living being at any time either by mental, vocal, or bodily activities. The term for suffering, _klesa_, originally means mental suffering and is loosely used in the same sense as _duhkha_, originally referring to mental and physical suffering. This definition is reiterated by a commentator to the _Baudhayana-Dharmasutra_, who affirms that not to cause suffering to living beings by speech, mind or body is ahimsa.

A Jain text raises an interesting rhetorical question: if it is a fact that those who kill (himsa) go to the place full of great suffering after death, why should not great sin be incurred by causing suffering to others? In a similar vein the _Dhammapada_ assures that whenever one desists from any wish to injure (himsa-mana), there is the cessation of suffering. The above references explain ahimsa as not causing suffering.

One may also note that the Buddhist term avihimsa is defined as that 'by which another being is not harmed (na vihethyate)'. It is an antidote to the mental factor called _avihimsa_ Thus it refers to _avihimsa_ too as a mental factor. In another Sanskrit Buddhist text _avihimsa_ is defined as compassion (karunata).

In one of the later _Upanishads_ the observation of the omnipresent self (sarvagata-atman) is said to be the highest ahimsa.
Some texts treat ahimsa as ‘internal purification’ (antahsauca). A Jain text says that the absence of attachment (raga) and other passions is ahimsa. Renunciation of both types of possession, external (bhya) as well as internal (abhvantara-aprigraha), is also said to be ahimsa. These references point out a concept of ahimsa in which purity of mind is the predominant characteristic.

Furthermore, one may note that a monk uses alms food not for sport, indulgence, decoration, but simply eats what is necessary for the support and sustenance of the body for keeping it unharmed (vihimsauparati). Casually, non-violence is thought to be practiced towards oneself, although as a rule it is applicable to other living beings. Hence the phrase all living beings can be considered to include both the agent and other living beings.

A monk who dwells in strife and uproar, given to dispute and wounding others with the weapons of the tongue, has abandoned three conditions: dispassionate thinking (nekkhamma-vitakka), benevolent thinking (abyapada-vitakka) and non-violent thinking (avihimsa-vitakka). On the other hand, a monk who dwells in harmony and mutual courtesy without wrangling has made a habit of these three virtues. This opinion connects vocal and mental nonviolence.

According to Vyasa the yogic ahimsa means absence of oppression (anabhidroha) towards all living beings (sarva-bhuta) in all respects (sarvatha) and for all times (sarvada). Other moral restraints and moral rules are the roots of ahimsa. All these promote perfect ahimsa.

The ascetic conception of ahimsa differ from the Vedic conception by not including any form of justified violence into the idea of ahimsa. Nor does it imply that any type of himsa is morally good.

ASCETIC CRITICISM OF THE VEDIC AHIMSA

Sramanic or ascetic ahimsa differs from the Vedic ahimsa. The supporters of the former have ardently opposed the Vedic idea of ahimsa. The Yoga-Sastra by Hemacandra makes a covert reference to Manu and some other Brahmanic writings as himsa-sastras (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 himsa as a duty’.29 It is better to be a poor materialist (carvaka) who is an open heretic rather than a demon in disguise.

A Jain argument is put forward against the exceptions sanctioning violence: If violence can be good at all, then indiscriminate killing would be meritorious. If great merit would result from killing, how is it that one feels uneasiness (sukha-vighna, ‘obstacle to happiness’) at the time of killing other beings?

The Samkhya-Karika opposes scriptural means sanctioned by the Mimamsa system for terminating suffering only temporarily, and not completely either, because it involves impurity (avisuddhi) in the form of himsa, destruction of moral merit (ksaya) and surpass ability (atisaya) in its result.30 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 Samkhya-Sutra says that the scriptural means of the Mimamsa are in truth equal to the worldly means because they are full of sin caused by himsa, and the result is also only a temporary good (vinasiphalai), and is unequal to that experienced hereafter. The critic adds that there is no proof of limiting the scope of the general statement na hmisyat sarva-bhutani (‘not violating all the living beings’).31

The above references demonstrate that the peak of criticism of the Vedic ahimsa is directed against the approval of exceptions to the universal principle of non-violence.

BRACKETED AND AFFILIATED TERMS

Ahimsa has been translated into English by various writers as non-killing, non-injury, non-hatred, harmless, inoffensiveness, noncruelty, non-aggression, tenderness, innocence, good-will and love. Yet it is not only in English, but also in Indian languages that one finds a variety of bracketed and affiliated terms: one comes

29 Ibid., 2.40.
30 Samkhya-Karika, 2.
31 Vijnanabhinivsa on Samkhya-Sutra, 1.6.
across many synonyms too. A few samples may be noted. In Jainism, for instance, ahimsa is frequently used as a technical term; hence there is hardly sufficient reason to refer to a number of unethical affiliated terms. Even then a Jain sutra mentions thirty specific names for himsa and sixty for ahimsa.

In Pali Buddhism the situation is different. The term ahimsa is seldom used, and it is not even a technical term. So one has to refer to other terms also in order to study the Buddhist equivalent of ahimsa to establish an analogy with other Indian literary sources. The terms avihimsa (injury, killing) and avihimsa (non-injury) appear sometimes in the Buddhist texts.

Avihimsa, in Pali texts, refers mainly to mental nonviolence in the form of intention or resolution (avihimsa-sankappa); whereas the rule ‘not to kill living beings’ is expressed by the words panatipata veramani. Another term for non-hurting is avihertana the absence of various types of harassment.

Further more, anupaghata broadly means non-injury, but more specifically absence of less intensive injury. A term for ‘non-offensive’ is anoparambha. One of the characteristics of a real Brahmin and ascetic is said to be refraining from injury to living beings. The term danda, means a stick, punishment and physical injury. J.B. Homer says that danda is a synonym for duccarita, wrong behavior in body, speech and thought, which afflicts and injures and brings to trouble and distress.

A true monk cultivates a mind full of friendliness (metta-citta), non-anger (avera) and non-ill-will (abyapajja). The words one utters ought to be non-harsh (ok tkkasa) and non-hurting (na abhisajana). To understand the meaning and application of Buddhist non-violence in the perspective of the whole of ethics, one has to refer to a variety of terms.

In specific contexts one may refers to a number of other affiliated or bracketed terms, also in respect of other schools of thoughts or writings. The Puranas praise, for instance, the gift of fearlessness (abhaya-pradana) Absence of enmity (nirvaira). peacefulness (santi) and equal-mindedness (samadarsana) are among the merits of a

32 Prasnavyakarana- Sutra, 1.2.
33 Dhammapada,142.
monk. A definite non-violent attitude is implied when it is said that those do not live long who take joy in violence (himsa-viharw), are cruel (krura) are backbiters (sucaka) create obstacles in good activities (karya-dusaka), destroy green grass, kill buffaloes and goats and set forests on fire. And one may not quarrel with one's own kinsmen. ‘Not giving troubles’ to others may also be one specific sense of non-violence.

TWO TRADITIONS OF AHIMSA

The Ancient definitions of ahimsa are basically two. The Vedic conception is clearly given by Manu; according to it, Vedic himsa is bracketed within ahimsa, although, of course, it does not exhaust the meaning and connotation; of Vedic non-violence.

The ascetic conception of non-violence is clearly defined both by the Jains and the yogins yet there are no conceptual differences between the Jainas, the Buddhists and the yogins. The differences of application are not due to conceptual differences, but other aspects of their doctrines.

In the Bhagavata-Purana Kapila says to his mother that for obtaining God there are two dharma: grama-dharma, ‘village-duty’, leading to worldly prosperity and moksha-dharma, leading to the highest end. In this light Indian ethical tradition can be divided into two main trends: one is for the maintenance of the social good and the other for the furtherance of individual spiritual development.

This difference in the conception of ahimsa reflects ‘a division of labour’ among the Indian schools of thought. One trend emphasizes the importance of the householder’s state of life here and now the other trend focuses attention upon the ultimate end of life. According to the ascetic branch of thought a layman’s ethics are the morality prescribed for a monk, thought in a much diluted form. From the point of view of the social tradition, a monk’s extreme ahimsa is a logical conclusion which is not to be practiced within the empirical ambit in preference to the support and sustenance of social life

It is useful here to remember the fact that there are two ways of considering

34 Bhagvata Purana, 11.14.16.
35 Ibid., 2.28.3.
values, especially in Hindu thought. According to one system only three values (trivarga), namely ethical value (dharma), economic value (artha) and psychological or hedonistic value (kama) are taken into consideration. This division seems historically earlier in the Vedic cultural tradition. In the upanisadic period the fourth value, moksha or the spiritual value, was added to the former three values. The four-value system differs from the three-value system in the nature of intrinsic value and in its value-hierarchy.

Both these value-systems are found within the Vedic tradition. Thus the bifurcation of ahimsa does not clearly follow the analogical distinction of the two value-systems.

It is obvious that the distinction of the two historical traditions of ahimsa has to be understood in a broad sense. They are not divided, in the literary sources, into two waterproof compartments but have been both enriched by mutual influence and the challenge of arguments. In the Dharma-sastras and Puranas there are many instances, the Bhagavad-Gita being a perfect example, of attempts to integrate the society-directedness of the Vedic orthodoxy with the moksa-orientedness of the ascetic movements.

THE ROOTS OF AHIMSA

Why have men come to think of ahimsa as a norm of behavior? Several distinct explanations are possible. They are not mutually exclusive and look at the problem from different points of view.

In the Atharvaveda, Indra is worshipped as a rescuer, protector and slayer of the demon Vrtra. Indra is invoked not to let the mighty armies come upon the devotee himself but to cause his malefactors destruction. The aditya-gods are prayed to so that they may defend (raksa) the one who prays.

Freedom from enemies in the form of thieves and beasts of different types is praised. Let all things of mine, the devotee begs, be uninjured (arista). He prays that the speech abides in the mouth, breath in the nostril, sight in the eyes, hearing in the ears, that his hair does not grey, his teeth do not break and that the strength remains in
Ideal longevity is couched in terms of a life lasting one hundred years. The gods are praised to lengthen the span of a devotee's life so that he may live a hundred autumns. God Savitr is invoked to grant freedom from rivals in front, for the gift of fearlessness (abhaya) behind and to protect the devotee specifically from the south, whilst god Saci-pati is asked to protect him from the north.

In the Atharvaveda much valued things are: long life (ayus) vital air (prana), progeny (praja), cattle (pasu) achievement (kirti). Also material and physical well-being (subhuti) is prayed for; the pious person also ask for the welfare (siva) of cattle-property, livelihood (turj) prosperity (pusta) and wealth (vasu).

In two pre-upanisadic texts the fire-god Agni is described as auspicious (siva) and harmless (ahimsat) in regard to the offspring of the sacrificer. A he-goat is sacrificed to Agni who is thus appeased and made non-violent (ahimsa as a noun) towards the earth, air and trees, i.e. the whole world.

It seems that the desire for personal safety, and for the safety of one's family, friends and neighbours, and freedom from pain and also for the material means of bringing about all this, must be as old as conscious life itself. At first ahimsa, signifying safety may not have represented any moral norm. In the Vedas the earliest formulated wishes of being unharmed were amoral. This explanation of ahimsa in the sense of safety coincides with the etymology of the concept. Later the meaning of this Vedic term acquired a moral quality.

**Opposition to animal sacrifices**

a) **Good factual effects of sacrifice.** During the Vedic period sacrifices were an essential part of religion. In the later hymns and in the Brahmans a very complicated sacrificial system is described. The word Brahmana is derived from Brahman meaning ‘prayer’ or ‘devotion’, particularly at sacrificial ceremonies, and the Brahman so called because they are repositories of such utterances. The prayers were normally accompanied by small gifts such as grain and ghee. But this simple form of worship became more and more

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37 Ibid.6.79.2.
complicated and in the course of time gave rise to elaborate sacrifices and also to a special class of professional priests who alone, it was believed, could officiate at them.

According to Manu killing animals in keeping with the Vedic injunction leads a twice-born as also the slaughtered animal to the highest (uttama) position.\(^{38}\)

The effect of a sacrifice is, according to a puranic story, so great that \(\text{Indra}\) was able to wash off the sin of \(\text{brahma-hatya}\) (killing a brahmin) by performing a horse sacrifice (haya-medha) for god Narayana.

The \(\text{Mimamsa}\) principle is stated by \(\text{Khandadeva}:\) The specific rule of killing at certain sacrifices is stronger than the general rule prohibiting killing.\(^{39}\)

Thus the killing of animals at sacrifices was considered, as a matter of fact, good for all. According to Manu this type of prescribed killing was incorporated in the concept of ahimsa. According to the \(\text{mimamsakas}\) killing is himsa but, if prescribed, it is a moral duty.

b) Voices of opposition. Yet these bloody animal sacrifices did not fail to arouse criticism and protest. Even in the ancient \(\text{Samaveda}\) it is said: ‘We use no sacrificial stake. We slay no victims. We worship entirely by the repetition of the sacred verses’.\(^{40}\) In more than one place the \(\text{Upanishads}\) decry the value of sacrifices.

According to traditional thought, during the ideal period of \(\text{satya-yuga}\) animals were not killed (ahimsya) in sacrifices. Killing at sacrifices started in the second period of \(\text{treta-yuga}\) and was continued thereafter. During the \(\text{treta-yuga}\), when the rules of good conduct disappeared and people began to resort to violence, Brahma created the \(\text{ksatriyas}\) to protect the four castes and also initiated sacrifice without killing animals (pasu-himsa).

The \(\text{Bhagavata-Purana}\) permits no himsa but preaches that it is sufficient just to touch an animal in the sacrifice. As mud cannot be cleansed by mud and a wine-drinker cannot be purified by wine, in the same way the sin incurred by

\(^{38}\) Manu 5.42.

\(^{39}\) Khandadeva on Mimamsa- Sutra 10.8.8.

\(^{40}\) Samaveda, 1.2.9.2.
slaying creatures (*bhuta-hatya*) cannot be removed by performing sacrifices. Those who kill animals at sacrifices are, moreover, considered to be hypocrites (*dambhika*).

Sometimes killing at sacrifices is regarded as being of partial good only. This is borne out by the story of *Satya*, a Brahmin, who lost the merit accrued from other penances by resorting to sacrificial killing. The demerit due to killing weighs heavier than the merit gained by ritual killing (*himsa*) at sacrifices.  

Furthermore, the merit of a man practicing ahimsa is said to be inexhaustible, as he is continually performing sacrifice, and ahimsa is like the begetter of all creatures. Killing animals at sacrifices is even called *adharma*.

The *Kural*, the South Indian ‘Tamil-Veda’ as it is sometimes called, disapproves of sacrifices and claims that to save the life of one being and abstain from its meat is better than performing a thousand sacrifices and offering *havis* (whatever is given as an offering, e.g. *ghee*). The author of the *Kural* does not seem to deny that by performing a sacrifice one can obtain good results. Not to kill, however, is an even higher virtue.

Thus, in the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and *Dharmastra*s there are three views represented: one considers killing at sacrifices beneficial, the other denies this. Or, thirdly, it may be taken as a mixed good.

The ascetic schools take a more radical view on the moral justification of sacrificial killing. A *Samkhya* text explains that for the sake of ahimsa the *yogins* and followers of *Samkhya* sacrifice no animals, since this involves killing (*himsa*) and causes suffering (*duhkha*). Moreover, suffering produces suffering and does not destroy ignorance (*aviveka – avidya*).

The Jains are well-known for their opposition to sacrificial killing. *Hemacandra* rejects the orthodox view which states that by offering rice, barley, fruits and the like the forefathers are satisfied for one month but by offering fish and meat they are satisfied for a longer period extending from

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41 *Bhagavata-Purana*, 1.9.52.

42 *The Kural* L.26.259.

43 *Samkhya-Pravacana-Bhasya* 1.84.
two months to twelve years (if the offering is the meat of a rhinoceros). This type of himsa, he states, committed by the ignorant (mudha) paves the path to hell (durgahi).

According to the Pali sources the sacrificing priests are accused of ruining the doctrine (dhamma) when they kill unoffending beings (adusika). The type of sacrifice which is most appropriate is that which does not involve the slaughter of oxen, goats, fowls, pips or any other living creature. Observance of the five silas is said to be the best type of sacrifice (yanna). One who kills at a sacrifice believes that he gains merit (punna), although he gains demerit. This refers to ignorance as the root of sacrificial killing.

Asoka ruled that not a single living being (jiva) should be sacrificed (na prajuhitavya). He considered abstention from sacrificial killing (an-arambha) as morally good (sadhu).

The vehement opposition against killing at sacrifices was a good cause for the protagonists of ahimsa. The extreme care of animal life might have originated in view of the fact that ahimsa flourished as a reaction against the ritual slaughter of animals. Non-violence did not come to be generally recognized so much as a reaction against injury done to men (e.g. in war), rather than as a profound opposition to the institutionalized killing of animals. The heterodox schools lived and prospered on this reaction, and their position was buttressed by the simultaneous denial of the authority of the Vedas.

This historical explanation of ahimsa, as opposition to the Vedic sacrifices, implies a philosophical argument: The idea that sacrificial killing has wholesome effects is based on ignorance, and right knowledge can dispel this ignorance. In this context one can refer to right knowledge as the root of ahimsa.

44 Yoga-Sutra 2.41-46.
45 Suttanipata, 3.11.
46 Asoka, Rock Edict, III and XI.
METAPHYSICAL EXPLANATION

A. Good and bad karmic fruits

a) *Dark and bright karmic consequences.* There are no basic disagreements among the main branches of thought about the nature of the consequences arising from both himsa and ahimsa. However, at the time of the Buddha there were thinkers such as *Purana Kassapa,* who according to *Pali* sources, seem to have repudiated the existence of karmic effects. Thus *Kassapa* taught that mutilating, causing grief, and killing does not cause demerit. Even if one were able, with a sharp razor, to turn the creatures of earth into one mass of flesh, no *sin* (*papa*) would be incurred on account of that action. 47

Thus there was no lack of critics. Nevertheless, the accepted tradition takes for granted that every moral act has an effect which is at the same time metaphysical or concerned with the structure of reality. This reality, however, is not the external reality, but inherent in every person himself.

*Karma* means 'action' carrying moral responsibility. The results of an act can be fourfold, as is explained by a *Pali* text; they may be (1) dark (*kunha*), (1) bright (*sukha*), (3) dark arid bright and (4) neither dark nor bright. 48 An act which is performed with complete detachment attracts no karmic inflow, has neither dark nor bright consequences; it is wholly good and not binding. An act which attracts bright consequences is next best.

The Jainsexplain that the channel of karmic inflow (*asrava*) is called yoga. This takes place through the activities of body (*kaya-yoga*), speech (*vacana-yoga*) and mind (*mano-yoga*). The inflow is of two types: good (*subha*) due to merit and bad (*asubha*) due to sin. Passions cause a mundane inflow of karmic matter; without passion the inflow is transient (*Tryapatha*). 49

b) *Self-violence due to violent motive.* According to the Jaina sources a violent man who is motivated by passion (*kasaya*), first injures himself (*atmahanana*), irrespective of the fact whether another being is injured or not *Kunda Kunda* 47 Majjhima II, p.81. 48 Ibid II. P.64. 49 Tattvartha-Sutra VI.2-4
Acarya defined violence (cheda, cutting) as uncontrolled behaviour such as sleeping, sitting, staying and going, i.e. physical actions. The commentary explains that impure activity is cheda, because it destroys monkhood which consists in pure activity. Therefore uncontrolled activity is always violent. In other words, impure mentality (asuddha-upayoga) is internal cheda whether a living being dies or not. One should more cautiously abstain from internal than external violence.

Some of the sources, when dealing with the nature of the results from actions, refer to ‘hell’ (naraka) and ‘heaven’ (svarga) both of which are thought to have a termination. One must not always take these two terms at their face-value. They convey the ideas of extreme condemnation and highest moral approval respectively.

Men who are engaged in killing living beings (prani-himsa) deserve to go to hell. Also a Buddhist sutta explains that those who are greedy, hostile and offending (i.e. wholly wicked), after death, go to darkness (lama) and fall head first into hell.\(^{50}\)

Manu sternly warns the evil-doers by saying that killers (himsra) become creatures who eat raw meat. An ideal agreeing with the talio principle is formulated by this ancient legal philosopher thus: A person who steals lamps becomes blind a person who extinguishes lamps untimely becomes one-eyed, from violence results ill-health and from nonviolence sound health. The commentator S. Narayan affirms that a person involved in himsa is always afflicted with diseases (rogi).\(^ {51}\)

The Jains explain that the ignorant who commit himsa by mind, speech or body suffer for long in the great forest of rebirths.

According to one Pali text, the life of one who, like a beast, takes delight in injuring (vihesa-abhirata) others is very wicked (pupiya) and he increases his own pollution (raja).\(^ {52}\) One who effects harmful activity by body, speech or mind is born into a world that is harmful (sa-hyahjjha): harmful sensory

\(^{50}\) Suttanipata 247.  
\(^{51}\) Manusmriti 12.59.  
\(^{52}\) Suttanipata 274.
impressions assail him, and he experiences harmful feelings which are also painful (dukkha).

A Sanskrit Buddhist text mentions that violence (vadha) creates disturbances (vibandha) in the welfare (sreyas) of the acting person himself. The descriptions of the evil consequences are varied. One who has enmity (vaira) towards beings cannot obtain mental peace (manas-santi). Action done with himsa kills faith (svadharma) and faith being destroyed, it ruins the man. The person who commits injury to harmless beings for the sake of his own pleasure (atma-sukha-iccha) never makes peaceful progress (sukham-edha) anywhere in life or here-after. The merit of other penances is destroyed if one practices himsa. A Jain sutra reiterates that self-restraint (dama), worship of gods and guru, gifts (dana), study (adhayana) and penance (tapas) all become fruitless (aphala) if one does not abstain from himsa.54 Sometimes an externally trifling injury (alpa-himsa) can bring serious results (analpa-phala), whilst in other cases externally grievous injury (maha-himsa) may have only minimal consequences. The differing results accruing on the agent are due to the motive and not due to the external result.

For a summary statement of this problem, expressed in mythological terms, one may refer to the Kurma-Purana. The creator god Prajapati Brahma generated violence (Himsa) from Adharma. From Himsa again two sons were born, Nikrti (evildoer) and Anrta (falsehood); from Nikriti sprang Bhaya (fear) and Naraka (hell). Maya (illusion) and Vedana (pain) were two twin daughters. Further, from Bhaya and Maya was born Mrtyu (death); the offspring of Naraka and Vedana was Duhkha (suffering). From Mrtyu came Vyadhi (misery), Jara (old age), Soka (grief), Trsna (greed), and Krodha (anger). They are all indicators (laksana) of adharma (vice), and their consequences are always painful.

In short, morally evil himsa has evil consequences. On this point the different schools of thought are in full agreement.

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53 Abhidharma-Dipa p.417.
54 Manusmriti 5.45 and 4.170.
c) Karmic consequences of ahimsa: Moksha or heaven as fruit. A follower of non-violence cannot go to hell. Often several moral qualities are required: One who abstains from himsa, endures everything (sarva-saha) and is a shelter to all (sarva-asraya) is fit to go to heaven (svarga). In another context, the habit of non-violence (ahimsa-nirata), truth-fullness of speech and sense-control, practiced always, are needed to obtain the merit of the vajapeya sacrifice, or heaven.

The Vardha-Purana promises freedom from rebirth (garbha, womb). Immortality (amrtatva) is the fruit of non-violence according to the Jainas, Manu and some of the Upanishads.

On the authority of the Buddhist doctrine, one who is neither a self-tormentor (an-attantapa) nor tormentor of others (a-parantapa) achieves in this birth (dittha) emancipation (mubuta).

There are some additional moral fruits. By the practice of non-violence and some other virtues one becomes free from all sins (kilvisa). The observance of yama, including ahimsa, removes even the great sins (agha), just as fire destroys a tree. In one who follows vows, the god Siva destroys the tamasic nature by the lamp of wisdom (jnana). According to Yajnavalkya non-violence together with some other virtues, is a means for merit (dharma-sadhana).

A Buddhist doctrine is that a man can by means of nonviolence (avihimsa) lead himself to a higher state (upari-bhava).

Besides metaphysical betterment and moral improvement, one may also, by the practice of non-violence, make one's mind (sva-manas) capable of grasping Reality. One achieves without much effort that which one concentrates upon; such a one becomes happy (sukhin). By following ahimsa and thirty other moral qualities God becomes satisfied (tus). One obtains the highest beauty (para-rupa), and freedom from disease. According to the Jaina sources long life (dirgha-ayus), great beauty, health (arooya), lovability (slaghamyata) and fulfilment of desires (kama-da) are the fruits of ahimsa alone. In other words, the merits are so many that even if one were to

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55 Varaha- Purana 121.24.
56 Yajnavalkya- Smriti 1.122.
57 Majjhima I, p.60.
enumerate them for hundreds of years, they could not be exhausted.

Thus by being non-violent one accumulates good karmic consequences.

**B. The identity of atman and Brahman**

The central teaching of the Upanishads is that the subjective and the objective core, *atman* and *Brahman*, are identical. According to the *Matsya-Purana* one should see at man in all creatures.\(^58\) The *Gita* praises that knowledge as sattvic by which a man sees the one imperishable entity (*avyaya-bhava*) in all beings and the undivided in the divided.\(^59\) It has been occasionally proposed that non-violence is a logical and practical outcome of the above upanisadic teaching. Thus a *Vedantist* like Svami Abhedananda may tell us that the Vedanta alone provides a rational explanation of why we should love our neighbours as ourselves: This is simply because of the fact that the true self of our neighbour is one with our own true self.\(^60\) *Bhagavan Das* says of this spiritual unity that the conflict between selfishness and selflessness, egoism and altruism, is dissolved and the antagonists are reconciled, only when ego and alter realize their identity, when every alter 'other' becomes an alter-ego the small self becomes the all-self.\(^61\)

Here one must point out that the Upanishads, while admittedly teaching the identity-doctrine, pay less attention to ethics. Ahimsa is mentioned several times in the Upanishads but is not given any great importance before the advent of the heterodox schools of the Jains and the Buddhists.

According to the Jains, all souls are equal. The Jains propound the inviolability of the separate individuals.\(^62\)

The Buddha's doctrine of *anatta* (non-self), however, has given rise to controversy. According to some modern commentators it meant the absence of a permanent indwelling ‘self’, and so presented life and the series of lives as a stream of consciousness. *Narada Thera* comments that the culmination of *metta* is the identification of oneself with all beings (*sabbattata*).\(^63\) So also Edward J. Thomas,

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\(^{58}\) Matsya- Purana 116.42.
\(^{59}\) Gita 18.20.
who says that some form of atman-belief came to be rejected, and this included the belief in its eternity.64

If one tries to find an ontological basis for non-violence, there appear to be three roots: (1) the belief in the factual unity of all life (Upanishads), (2) the autonomy of every individual Jiva (Jainism) and (3) the impermanence of the individual self (Buddhism). In the purely ontological sense there would thus be three distinct, even contradictory roots (viz. the Jain interpretation of a separate self contradicts the other explanations, and also the Buddhist one which says that non-self contracts the upanisadic idea of permanent self.

One may add that the three roots are not contrary to each other in a value-metaphysical sense, if one understand unity as an ideal to be observed in action, not as a fact of reality, although it may or may not be factual; but this is irrelevant for the practice of non-violence.

THE GOLDEN RULE

In the Yajurveda a wish for universal friendliness is expressed: “May all beings look at me with a friendly eye may I do likewise, and may we all look on each other with the eyes of a friend.”65 These words could be taken to signify the various stages in the development of a concept. First, man desired that others might treat him in a friendly way, then he found others desiring the same. A moral principle was formulated when the friendly attitude was generalized, and the final proposition was: May every person look on the other with the friendly eye.

This moral principle can be traced in Jain sources also. All beings are fond of life, life is dear to all.

According to the Buddhists, one may not kill while making others similar to oneself. One who seeks happiness (sukha) should not strike (danda), on being likewise desirous of happiness. All men fear injury, all love life. Assimilating others to one-self, one should not slay.

In the Gita the yogin is asked to look on all as one by analogy with his own self (atma-aupamya). One Purana mentions that a man desirous of his own welfare

65 Yajurveda, 36.18.
should not have enmity (droha) towards others. Action which is against one's own desire (atma-pratikula) should also not be done to others.

This Golden Rule was formulated in the Anusasana-Parva long before Christianity. One should never do that to another which one considered undesirable (pratikula) for one self (atman). The Golden Rule of the Anusasana-Parva is given in a negative form, but the following explanation involves both negative and positive expressions.

Samkara mentions that a yogin should compare the self of all beings (sarvatra) with his own, and therefore he should do only that to others which is desirable (anukula or ista) and pleasant (sukha) to his own self but should refrain from doing that to others which is undesirable (pratikula or anista) and unpleasant (duhkha) for himself. Samkara's conclusion is that a yogin should be non-violent (ahimsaka) towards others.

The Golden Rule may be considered as a moral explanation of ahimsa without involving any metaphysics. It is the common ethical ideal in Indian thought.

SOCIAL EXPLANATION

A. Suspension of antipathy

If one were to address others harshly, they would retort with blows in retaliation (patidanda) and would bruise him who was quarrelsome and violent. One is advised not to associate with those who kill refugees, children and women. However, the person practicing non-violence and being content with learning deserves to be invited as the sacrificial supervisor (Brahma-asana).

The Buddhists call one who practises non-violence, together with some other virtues, wise (dhira) and an elder (thera). He may be called ‘noble’ because of his ahimsa. But an armed man creates only fear (bhaya).

There should be a willing suspension of antipathy (vaira-tyaga) in the presence of a non-violent man. All directions are full of pleasure for him who never harbors ill-feelings (amangala-bhava) towards anyone. He who arouses fearlessness

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66 Bhagavata- Purana, 10.1.44.
67 Anusasana- Parva, 113.8.
68 Samkara’s Commentary on The Gita, 6.32.
69 Suttanipata 935.
(abhaya) in others reaps the results of what he gives to them.

The role of ahimsa in opposing sacrifices which are economically wasteful, cruel and based on erroneous ideas about their effects, has been well recognized.

There seems, however, to have been; another factor which can be compared in importance to the opposition to the Vedic sacrifices. The Pali sources record that there were plenty of highway-men and robbers, many of them as cruel as Angulimala, who wore a garland of human fingers round his neck. From among the numerous references one may just mention a couple of them: Whosoever destroys or lays siege to villages, towns, and is known as an usurper, let him be known as an outcast.70

A highway-man (mahacara, ‘big thief’) quickly comes to be killed. He strikes harmless people, plunders without leaving anything, kills women, violates young girls, robs even the monks and the treasury of the king.71 As a word of condemnation the Buddha says that a person is consigned to hell, according to his deserts, if he himself takes life or encourages another to slay or approves slaying.72

A contemporary scholar describes how (during economic prosperity) a good number of unfortunate and uprooted people became habitual criminals. This menace seems to have existed in all ancient Indian cities. There were castes of professional thieves. Crime was also rampant in the countryside and large bands of robbers are referred to from the time of the Buddha onwards. Trading caravans were heavily guarded but were anyway frequently robbed by highwaymen.73

The dhamma of the Buddha may have virtually weaned away the people from habits of robbery. This may also have been one of the chief causes of royal patronage for Non-violence. Edward Conze mentions how royal patronage was one of the main springs for the tradition of non-violence in India.74

The Buddha advised abstention from taking human life. The non-taking of life gives fearlessness (abhaya), non-hatred (avera) and non-ill-will (abyapajjha). One becomes a partaker (bhagi) in unbounded fearlessness. Abandoning various intoxicants (Sura-meraya-majja) which cause indolence (pamada) has also the same

70 Ibid.
71 Anguttara- Nikaya IIIp.421.
72 Ibid., I,p.278 and II, PP.87-88.
Injury also causes strife and counter-violence. There are nine bases for strife (aghata): when somebody has done, is doing or will do me harm (anattha), when somebody has done, is doing or will do harm to a dear one (piya) and when somebody has done, is doing or will do good (attha) to somebody disliked (appiya) by me.  

The Buddha emphatically and persistently fought against such social maladies like robbery, strife, fear of violence and the use of intoxicants. He paid more attention to these social evils than the Jainas, who were more concerned about the slaughter of animals at sacrifices. This seems to have provided a good reason for the spread of non-violence.

**RIGHT KNOWLEDGE AS THE ROOT OF NON VIOLENCE**

The question is posed: How does the intention of non-violence (avihimsa-sankappa) originate? The origination is the perception of nonviolence (avihimsa-sanna). The origination of moral habit is in the mind (citta).

One Sanskrit Buddhist text mentions that vihimsa originates from ignorance (klesa). Violence is the bad result of ignorance. Furthermore, violence is described as a minor effect of ignorance (upa-klesa). One may infer that if ignorance is the root of violence, then the absence of ignorance or right knowledge dispels this type of violence.

The Jains also recognize that ignorance (ajnana) cannot lead to right conduct (caritra), which is based on knowledge. One has first to strive for right belief, and then knowledge and conduct become right.

One Jaina text mentions that those are virtuous who have arrived at the right understanding of the four passions (i.e. ignorance, greed, pride and anger) and who have well practiced self-control (dhuya).

According to a general notion in Indian ethics right conduct and, more specifically, every single virtue, presupposes right knowledge. By right knowledge we can knowingly guide our behaviour.

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75 Anguttara-Nikaya, IV. Pp.48-49.  
76 Abhidharmakosa by Vasubandhu 2.27.  
77 Sutrakrtanga- Sutra 1.2.2.29.