CHAPTER-II

NON-VIOLENCE IN VEDIC ERA

Vedas are the earliest scriptures of the Hindus. Thinkers and reformers, both ancient and modern base their tenets on the Vedas. The Vedas give them a divine origin because they are considered to be direct revelations from God.

The Vedas mean supreme knowledge and are considered to have been revealed by God to the sages. As they were revealed they consisted of one hundred thousand verses and had four divisions. The Puranas say that in course of time the division got mixed up and some verses fell into disuse. The sage Vedavyasa, the classifier of the Vedas, seeing the sorry state in which these divine revelations had fallen collected the verses and in order to perpetuate them in the proper form taught the four divisions to four of his disciples. The Hindu believe that the four Vedas have come to us in that form.

The four Vedas are Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda. Out of these the oldest and the most important is the Rigveda. It is actually a collection of sacred hymns in verses of different metres addressed to the many Gods and Goddesses of the Aryans. The second Samaveda contains mainly musical hymns meant for chanting during the sacrifices. There is hardly anything new in samaveda which does not appear in Rigveda. Yajurveda again is a ritual Veda which gives guidance to the priests in the conduct of the sacrifice. Lastly, the Artharvaveda is a collection of incantations and popular charms based on black magic and superstition.

Each Veda consists of three parts; the Samhita or the collection of hymns, the Brahmanas or liturgical discussions and Arayankas or forest treaties of which the Upanishad form a part. The four Samhitas are used for recitation during the performance of sacrifices. The Brahmanas which come immediately after the Samhitas discuss the efficacy or sacrificial worship and give detailed instructions about the conduct of the sacrifices. The Brahmanas are mostly written in prose. Aranyakas belong to a class different from the other two, they are meant as topics for contemplation of the people who have escaped from the world of pleasure and pain to the forest retreats. The Upanishads deal with philosophy and is also called Vedanta or the end of the Vedas. The Upanishads contain the earliest gems of Indian thought.
If one makes a brief survey of the socio-ethical structure of the people of the Vedic age regarding their ways of living, their attitude towards others, the basis of their morality, their feelings about other inhabitants of the society, one can easily understand that their attitude towards themselves as well as towards others was suffused with a feeling of Ahimsa. They moved in the society in such a way that there existed social harmony and congenial atmosphere for all the beings. According to Vedic tradition, people used to share their wealth with others. This notion was inspired by their belief that those who do not share their wealth according to their conception Indra subdues them. And this was the reason that the Vedic people prayed to the Lord to save them from the ill-thoughts of harbouring enmity towards anybody and they prayed to keep off all such thoughts. They had a desire to bear affection for all in the same way as a cow shows it to her new born calf.\(^1\)

The social structure of the Vedic society was based on the peaceful atmosphere and cooperation among the inhabitants of the society. A dutiful son was expected to be obedient to his father and to be like minded with his mother. It was enjoined upon a woman to speak sweet and gentle words to her husband. The mutual relationship between a brother and sister was expected to be agreeable to each other. They liked to have a common community food and drink and were to worship Agni unitedly like spokes around a nave. They used to feel satisfied and therefore happy on the day they would be able to gain to virtue, conquer evil and becomes guiltless. They disliked niggardliness and harter against each other. A feeling of love towards everybody along with a great sense of duty and unity in performance of various deeds reflects the existence of an Ahimsaka behaviour prevailing in the society. They wanted to be dear to all whether friend or foe, noble or ignoble and loved fearlessness.

The Vedic prayers are full of a feeling of loving kindness, non-hatred, truth, righteousness and non-ill towards all. These ingredients are nothing but various constituents of Ahimsa. The people prayed to Lord Indra to instill in them fearlessness from all the quarters, from friend, enemy, known, unknown, day and night.\(^2\) Fearlessness is one of the qualities of a non-violent person. Since fearless persons never harbour ill ideas for anybody so they are fearless in themselves and they provide fearlessness to all. Only violent persons are fearful for themselves and furious

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1 Athar Veda, 3.36.1.
2 Ibid., 19.15.6.
for others. In praying for fearlessness to Lord Indra, people wanted to be blessed with a non-violent attitude towards all. Only then they could become fearless. Violent persons are always engaged in wishing ill to others; in turn they themselves are fearful expecting revenge from others. When a person is non-violent, i.e. compassionate towards all and endowed with a feeling of friendliness, no fear prevails for him any quarter.

The Vedic people used to keep the vow of righteousness. They sought it from Agni in their entreaties. While praying to Gods they used to say, “I shall keep the vow of righteousness. Bless me with strength therefore. May success attend to me. I enter from untruth to truth. I abandon untruth and accept truth.”

The people prayed to Gods to make them travelers on the path of righteousness and followers of honesty. They were keen to have good friends and prayed for bestowing on them good friendship. They made a devout request to God to lead them to riches through righteous means and remove every sin that made them wanderer and stray. Apart from the desires for riches, male progeny, domestic welfare, cattle, etc., the ancient people aspired for wisdom too and prayer to Varuna, Agni and Prajapati for the same. They wanted peace within and peace without, in the sky, air, plants, trees, all Gods, universe and everywhere. They wanted to be blessed with such a strength that would make all the creatures regard them as their friends and entreated Gods for the same. This prayer for friendship shows the inner urge for friendliness, mutual trust, cooperation and help towards all that inhabit this universe. This non-violence attitude towards all the beings was deep-rooted in their hearts. It is noticeable in their various social and religious performances. Here are some illustrations which bear an evidence as to how the concept of Ahimsa was alive among the people in its different forms.

Charity, one of the constituents of the feeling of compassion towards others, is praised in the Rigveda and prayers are offered for the welfare of those charity minded persons who are desirous of giving. To give charity means helping the needy of providing him necessary things. To help others, to be a well-wisher of others, to become sorrowful on seeing others in sorrow and to make efforts to put an end to their

\[3\] Yajur Veda, 1.5.1.
\[4\] Ibid., 22.14.15.
misery are the qualities which a believer in Ahimsa possesses. Ahimsa not only means non-violence or non-killing as is generally understood but it also embraces in its ambit certain other qualities such as compassion, charity, a feeling of loving kindness, universal friendliness, forgiveness, non-hatred passionlessness etc.

Apart from a feeling of charity in any of the ways for the needy and the persons in distress, references are also found regarding the cultivation of a feeling of universal friendliness which is one of the constituents of the concept of Ahimsa. 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”.5 These words could be taken to signify the various stages in the development of the concept of Ahimsa. First, a man desired that others might treat him a friendly way, then he found others might treat him a friendly way, then he found others desiring the same. A moral principle can be formulated when the friendly attitude is generalized, and the final proposition is:

“May every person look others with a friendly eye.”

The people of the Vedic age had an intent desire to get rid of all sorts of ill-thoughts and used to think of the day when they could win over evil and sin. They had a faith in the truthful speech. They wished and prayed that truthful speech might guard them.6 This devotion towards truth shows regard for morality which helps in the practice of Ahimsa.

Further, the ancient people believed that helping others was to liberate oneself. They prayed to God to give them strength that might enable them to protect each other, to eat and dine together, to work together, to study for enlightenment so that they might live in unity and love without hating each other. And this behaviour served as a foundation for a harmonious social set-up with an Ahimsaka attitude among the inhabitants of that society. These illustration mainly from the Vedas show that the people of the Vedic times followed the virtues of charity, honesty, peace, a feeling of friendliness towards all, and unity.

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5 Ibid.
6 Rigveda, 10.37.2.
Truly speaking, the qualities like charity, honesty, peace, benevolence, friendliness etc. are a state of mind and form the constituents of Ahimsa. Therefore, Ahimsa is also a state of our mind. It may be physical or vocal form the stand point of its manifestations through different doors of actions. The decision of doing such act appears at the sphere of our mind and accordingly it appears through physical or vocal door and materializes thereby. If a physical act or vocal act is performed which has no corresponding link with the mind, then it may not be a real form of an act, or if we claim to practice Ahimsa were physically and vocally having to hearing with mind it cannot be the real form of Ahimsa. It may only be an external soul. The description in the Vedas is very lively and clearly states that the ancient seers practiced ahimsa in real sense of the term. It was a part of their being and thinking as well as their actions were saturated with this state of mind.

Ahimsa in the Upanishads

The concept of Ahimsa was very much alive during the Upanisadic age too. The references appearing in *Brahdar-anyakopanisad*, Narayanopanised bear an evidence that the various virtues such as *dan*, compassion, kindness, self control, practice of non-injury towards all beings, self-realization, equipoise of mind, sympathy and austerity were given importance in the society and these all in turn led to a non-violent atmosphere all around. According to *Brhadaranyakopanisad* one becomes good by good action and bad by bad action. The doer of good deeds becomes good and the doer of bad deeds becomes bad virtues make one virtuous and wickedness makes one wicked. Others, however, say that man consists of desires. As is his desire, so is his will; so is the deed that he does. Thus, people of the Upanisadic age had knowledge of goodness, virtue and vice. They believed in the reward of good deeds. The Upanisads appreciate noble will and noble desire and the nobility comes only when one’s heart is saturated with the various attributes or constituents of Ahimsa which serve as the basis of any noble deed or any act of morality.

An interesting episode occurs in the *Brahdarayakopanisad*. The threefold off springs of Prajapati- Gods, men and demons-lived with their farther as students of sacred knowledge. On the completion of their studies, Gods requested Prajapati to give them his benediction. Prajapati uttered the letter ‘da’ which all the three

7 Brahadaranyakopanisad, 3.2.13.
offsprings understood in their own ways. The Gods understood that Prajapati instructed them to control themselves—'Damayatta'. According to Sankara, Gods are said to be naturally unruly and hence were asked to practice self-control to keep peace and harmony at the universal level. Men understood that they were instructed to give—'Datta'—for men by nature are avaricious and hence should distribute their wealth according to the best of their capacity. Demons understood that they were asked to be compassionate—Dayadhvam. The Demons by nature are cruel, arid hence they were asked to be compassionate and kind to all. All the three virtues help a man in his effort to perfect himself in the practice of non-injury towards all. Self-control helps in overcoming the lustful passions, charity puts a stop in greed and the practice of compassion helps one in developing feeling for others and help others who are in misery. According to Sankara there are no Gods other than the man. If cruel and bent upon injuring others, man is a demon. Man can attain all the three virtues that are a great help in realizing the true purpose of life—the self realization. A callous man may be called a demon in human form. This also confirms that infliction of injury upon others is to be vehemently denounced. A violent man is no better than a demon.

A mind of equipoise can be attained by the practice of self-denial that helps a man to face the joy and sorrow, without being elated and disheartened by happiness and misery. True compassion stands for helping others to get rid of their sorrows. It is not mere sympathy by lip. The word ‘austerity’ has been used for all the forms of self-control. Morality, truth, study of and listening to the sacred books peace, charity and sacrifice all are termed as austerity.

Towards the end of the Chandogya Upanisad, one finds the parting advice to students that was given by Brahma to Prajapati to Manu and by Manu to mankind. According to this advice, after having learnt the Vedas, he who settles down in a home of his own, continues the study of what he has learnt, concentrates all his sense into the self, practices non-injury to all creatures except at holy places; behaving thus throughout his life attains the world of Brahma and does not return to this world again. Sankara translates sarva-bhutani as all creatures, both animate and inanimate. In this way, the concept of non-injury is to be extended to the animal world also:

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8 Narayanopanised, 140.10.
By this expression, Sankara means that even traveling as a mendicant is allowed to beg for alms at sacred places. Herein is found the culmination of Ahimsa, not to trouble others by being dependent on them or to talk of taking life of any creature whatsoever.

In the Taittirriya Upanisad, references are found where the teacher exhorts students to follow truth, virtue, welfare, prosperity; to revere parents, teachers and guests as God; to practice blameless deeds; to follow teachers in righteous deeds; to give up fear, and to practice sympathy. Students, when in doubt are asked to follow the footsteps of Brahmans who are competent to judge, devoted to good deeds, not led by others, not harsh and are lovers of virtue. And this is nothing but a path of Ahimsa.

S. Radhakrishnan in this translation and commentary of the Taittirriya Upanishad says that the Brahmanas have spontaneity of consciousness which is love for all the beings. Their tenderness of sentiment and enlightened conscience should be the standard for all.

The aim and theme of Kathopanisad is to teach charity. Ahimsa in reality mean not to harm any person physically and apparently but to be sincere and cautious in not harming anyone. To make it more clear, one may not harm others apparently but his actions, words and thoughts, may not, in the long run, be injurious to others. Likewise, if a person gives in charity a worthy thing with faith, he follows Ahimsa in letter and spirit, whereas a thing given in charity by a person not with faith but only in name, discredits him as not following Ahimsa in spirit for in that case he is not charity minded in the real sense. Ahimsa demands sacrifice of all that is dear to us. Kathopanisad has distinguished these as two different things-pleasure and definiteness. Men’s highest good lies not in pleasure but in moral goodness. Man is approached by both pleasant and good. The wise resort to good and the simple ones to pleasant, i.e., to enjoy the worldly pleasures.

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9 Sankara’s commentary on Chandogya Upanisad, 7.15.1.
10 Taittirriya Upanisad, 1.2.
12 Kathopanisad, 1.2.3.
The Prasnopanisad teaches us that Brahma, i.e., the knowledge cannot be got without austerity, chastity and faith. The seer Pippalada asked the seekers of Brahman, to live with him for one year more with chastity, austerity and faith. A man of chastity loses his foremost quality as soon as he injures anyone in thought, word or deed. Austerity is self-restraint sacrifices his sensual enjoyments for the sake of self realization. He never yields to his carnal desires. To injure others in any way is to give in to a base desire. Right faith will not lead a man to such a step that may prove to be injurious and harmful to others.

Austerity, i.e., the Tapas is the root of the knowledge of self-goodness which is obtained by practicing austerity; understanding is developed by goodness and knowledge of self comes by understanding. A body burnt in the fire of austerity, has no cremation and does not require any Sradha ceremony like that cooked food that need not be cooked again. This shows the glory of (Tapas) that has its root in Ahimsa. When approached by Asvalayana to instruct him in the knowledge of Brahman to free him from impurities Lord Brahma advised him to seek Brahman by faith, devotion, meditation and concentration and not by work or by offsprings or by wealth, but it is only by renunciation that one attains eternal life. This instruction emphasizes the right faith, absence of craving for a son and money. Karma can also mean rituals that have been underestimated before the lust of meditation, concentration, faith and renunciation. Sankara also accords preference to knowledge.

The knowledge of Atman requires power of understanding; power of understanding is developed by possessing goodness; and goodness is attained by practicing austerity. Austerity is an all-inclusive word. It embraces all that is good and great. Ahimsa is to be given top-ranking position. All their foregoing illustrations clearly attest the fact that man’s life is symbolically a sacrifice. Sacrifices in the Upanisads become self-denying act. For example, Bradaranyakopanisad opens with an account of Asvamedha, interpreting it as an act in which the individual offers the whole universe in place of the horse and by the renunciation of the world, attain spiritual austerity. A man of self-denial lives in the world but is not of the world. He

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13 Prasnopanisad, 1.2.
14 Mundokopanisad, 4.3.
15 Brahdarayakopanisad, 1.1.1.
has no attachment to worldly attractions that compel one to harm and injure others. And it is here that the concept of Ahimsa is realized in true sense.

Thus Ahimsa was considered to be the highest virtue not in the Vedic age but also in the Upanisadic age. The people of the Upanisadic age were very conscious about their deeds. They believed that bad deeds result into something bad. They followed the various virtues such as Dan, non-injury, equipoise of mind towards all in all circumstances, sympathy, austerity, wishing welfare for others, charity, sacrifice for good for others, non-greedy behaviour at all levels etc. they nor only followed the above virtues but they also strived for self-realization based on virtues.

**Ahimsa in Smritis**

Not only the Vedas and the Upanishads but in Smritis also references highlighting merits Ahimsa are to be found. Manu smriti states that non-injury to others results in attaining spiritual merit which is attained not at the cost of others but by living for others.\(^{16}\) Not to injure others, one of the constituents of Ahimsa, is regarded as one of the qualities that helps in the attainment of heavenly bliss. According to Manu, a man who injures innocent beings to please himself, never finds happiness, neither living nor dead. He who does not cause the death of living creatures, desiring good for all obtains endless happiness. He who does not injure any living creature, attains without an effort of what he thinks, of what he undertakes and what he fixes his mind on. Manusmriti also treats of Ahimsa as detachment from the sense-organs and performance of the Vedic duties and penance. One should avoid *Prani-himsa* the killing of the living beings, wine, meat, smells, garlands, and intoxicants.\(^{17}\)

Taking what is not offered, attachment to the wives of others and killing unlawfully (*avidhana*) are counted among the most evil acts resulting in great calamity in future rebirths. On the other hand, sex control, compassion, forgiveness, gifts, truthfulness, simplicity, non-stealing, modesty and self-restraints are praised as moral restraints.\(^{18}\) Among the supreme virtues are control of sense organs, Ahimsa, charity and study of Vedas as a means of self-restraints. The Bandhayan Smriti treats

\(^{16}\) Manu Smriti, 4.238.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Yajnavalkyasmitri, 1.18.
of Ahimsa as purifier of soul.\textsuperscript{19} Vyasasmriti exhorts to give up himsa. A student should give up aversion (vidvesa), despite, himsa and observing the rising sun.\textsuperscript{20} Expanding the merit of Ahimsa, Manu says that a person who does not like the killing or tying up of living beings and instead causes good (hita) attains happiness (sukha). At another place, Manu says that one should accumulate merit (Dharma) by avoiding to give trouble to any creature so as to find a companion in the next world.

\textit{Yajnavalkya} mentions Ahimsa, truthfulness, non-stealing purity, control of sense organs, gifts (dan) compassion (daya) and forgiveness (kshma) as means of merit for all. In \textit{Yajnavalkyasmrnti}, Ahimsa is stated not to be a meritorious act but even the association with the persons perpetrating in the act of killing is prohibited. For instance, one is advised not to associate with those who kill refugees, children and women.\textsuperscript{21}

References to Ahimsa towards animals and plants are found in the Smritis. Some means of livelihood such as cutting trees for fuel, earning a livelihood on one’s wife, killing animals, and constant and uninhibited use of medicine, constructing harmful instruments (Himsra-yantra) and selling oneself are regarded as crimes (Upapataka).

References forbidding Ahimsa toward animals and plants are found in \textit{Yajnavalkyasmrnti} and in \textit{Manusmrnti}. Manu exhorts to avoid certain professions which result into animal exploitation. He advises a Brahmana or a Ksatriya, living as a Vaisya at the time of distress, to refrain from cultivation which involves exploitation of other animals and killing.\textsuperscript{22} A person who commits injury to harmless beings for the sake of his own pleasure (atma-sukha-iccha) never makes peaceful progress (Sukhani-edha) anywhere in life or hereafter. At one place, he clearly states that violence results into ill-health and non-violence results into sound health. About the feeling of plants, Manu says that if a person destroys wild or cultivated plants without any just cause, he should be penalized with the looking after of a cow for one day subsisting on milk alone. Thus in essence one should avoid any type of Himsa even towards the plants and observe Ahimsa towards anybody without any discrimination. To eliminate the

\textsuperscript{19} Bandhayan Smrit, 175.
\textsuperscript{20} Vyasasmriti, 1.28.
\textsuperscript{21} Yajnavalkyasmrnti, 3.299.
\textsuperscript{22} Manu Smriti, 10.83.
killing of animals, Manu condemns meat-eating. One who desires to increase his own flesh (sva-mathsa) without sacrificing to the Divine or to the Gods is the worse type of sinner: (apunyakrta). Manu treats all those as killers who give consent to killing, who dismember a living body, who actually kill, who purchase or sell the meat, who prepare it, who serve it and who eat the meat. Without killing living beings, the meat cannot be made available and since killing is not conducive to an ultimate good (i.e. the attainment of heaven) one must give up meat-eating. The process of procuring meat involves killing as well as karmic bondage (bandhan). Keeping this in mind, one should refrain from eating all kinds of meat. Only when water has been sprinkled, when the appropriate mantras are recited and when the Brahmanas so desire, one may eat meat during the performance of a ritual. In short on the basis of the samritis, it can be said that the concept of Ahimsa was held in very high esteem.

Ahimsa in the Ramayana

The very first contact with the concept of Ahimsa in the Ramayana is Rama's attitude towards Kaikeyi. In the Aranyakanda, Laksmana in Panchavati, glorified Bharata and queries to Rama - "How can mother Kaikeyi, whose husband is Dasaratha and son Bharata, can have such crooked ways?" Listening this, Rama, who believed in returning good for evil and saw good in humanity, replied, "My brother, you should by no means, tax our second mother. Do you talk of that Lord of lksvaku race Bharatha?"

These words underline Rama's belief in the creed of 'forgive and forget'. That is the foundation of Ahimsa. Being born in Kastriya caste, Rama had to slay those who deserved to be slain in the interests of Brahmanas, seers, sages, and ascetics. He never got enraged with those that ought not to be slain.

Rama, the ideal of humanity would not have killed Yaksini because of her feminineness but for the sake of the good of the people. He was coerced to end her life for the welfare of the masses. He was aware other feminineness while killing her, that is why he hesitated in the beginning to slay her. Not only Rama but Sita also had faith in the virtue of Ahimsa. In Ravana's detention, in Asokavatika, Sita was kept inside a ring of Rakasis to keep a vigil on her so that she may not free herself from the

23 Ibid., 5.49.
clutches of the demon king. They were also instructed to reduce her to the luxurious life of Ravana's palace only if she yields to Ravana's will. However, one of the Raksasasis, named Trijata, saw a dream forecasting Rama's victory and Ravana's defeat. As the story of dream went about—among others, they all implored her forgiveness so that she might save them from the impending mighty disaster. Moved by their words, Sita decided that in the event of Rama's victory she will give protection to them. What they were doing to her was done on account of the vicious orders from Ravana. In case they disobeyed him, he would not have spared any one of them. This consideration of Sita reflects the non-violent build of her mind.

In the Ramayana, references are found where Sita narrated the story of an ascetic to Rama. Lord Indra, intending to disturb the ascetic, came in the guise of a warrior and kept an excellent scimitar as a trust with him. The ascetic, intent upon preserving his trust, went about everywhere with the scimitar. Constantly carrying the sword with him, the ascetic by degrees forewent all thoughts involved in ferocious sentiments. He lost his sobriety, went off the path of righteousness and went to hell as a result of bearing that weapon in band. Sita added that arms and hermitage, Ksatriya virtue and asceticism were opposites and suggested Rama to give up such aims and forgets that befooled one's spirits. This episode upholds Sita's non-violent mental make-up. To this Rama replied, that the primary duty of a Ksalya was to abolish distress from the face of the earth. Rama, as Ksatriya, thought it his duty to protect those ascetics of Dandakaranya who had sought his protection against the demons. He could not violate his promise of protecting them, even if for that matter he would have to renounce Sita and Laksmana. Even without any representation the protection of Brahmanas was incumbent upon Rama, and what could he say, when he had promised to do so. This statement of Rama, makes one to conclude that Rama as a ruler, holding the destiny of his country-men in his hands, thought it his duty to protect the ascetics even by resorting to violence. His Ahimsa laid in following his own dharma (Svadharma) disinterestedly. protecting the Brahmanas and living up to his promise in real sense, Rama and Sita's attitude was absolutely Ahimsaka towards all beings.

25 Ramayana Sunderkand, 27.39.
Ahimsa in the Mahabharata

In the Mahabharata, there are references saying that men indulging in killing living beings (Prani-himsa) deserve to go to hell. The merits of other penances is destroyed if one practises Himsa. Not only this but actions done with Himsa kills faith (sraddha) and faith being destroyed, it ruins them. One should never do that to another which one considered undesirable (pratikvia) for oneself (atman).

In the Santiparva, one is advised to treat another person in the same way as the person treats him. A delightful person (Maya-acara) should be made the victim of deception (Maya) while an honest man (Sadhu-acara) should be treated with honesty (Sadhu). This throws a flood of light on the practical aspect of Ahimsa. A king or a Head of State should treat the subjects and subordinates as a mother treats her children. However, he is not to submit to evil and evil-doer. Protection of the subjects is the quintessence of his duties. A true and an ideal mother loves her child but does not put up with its wrong attitude and ill-manners. A king is not to use unfair means to conquer the earth. To disassociate with unfair means is to associate with the virtue of Ahimsa.

Justifying the killings in a war, Bhishma states that Kstriyas, when fight the battle, no doubt, torture many creatures, but after victory they secure the advancement of all. Sin that accrues from battle is dissipated by charity.

A king punishes the wicked to maintain righteousness and to protect the people from plunder, destruction and affliction. He protects the subjects and gives them life, wealth and food. A righteous king destroys only those who deserve to be destroyed, not from any selfish motive but for the growth and advancement of his people. Just as the reclamer while reclaiming a field, uproots paddy blades grow more vigorously, a king acts no doubt but only to safeguard righteousness and true humaneness. The sin committed by the slaughterer, for the good of the many, is destroyed by penance and charity.

Further, there is a reference to the importance of non-injurious behaviour towards all. There was a king Sanaka, had one hundred wives but only one son. He

26 Mahabharata Shantiparva, 96.1.
27 Ibid., 17.3-8.
was keen to have one hundred sons for which he was ready to do anything good or bad. A Brahmana suggested him to sacrifice his only son Janata and let his queens smell the smoke of this sacrifice and that will fulfill his desire of a hundred sons. Janata also would be re-born of his former mother with a mark of gold at the back. The king consented. The boy was to be offered in sacrifice but his mothers, out of affection for him, cried piteously and tried to prevent the sacrifice. The Brahmana dragged him in fire and made an offering of his fat. The bereaved mothers smelt the smoke. Afterwards a hundred sons were born to the king, Janata being the eldest from his former mother.

Both the Brahmana and the king died in course of time. The king saw the Brahmana grilled in the hell fire and asked him the reason of being in the hell. The Brahmana replied that it was the result of performing that sacrifice for the king. As the Brahmana showed an indifferent attitude to the motherly feelings and affection of the hundred queens and did not mind the injury done to Janata, by killing him just for satisfying the worldly desire of the king, he had to bear the fruits of his evil, merciless and crude action. Although it was for the satisfaction and joy of the king, but the Brahmana, being the preceptor ought not to show the cruel ways of satisfying the desire of the king. Even though the king appealed to him for showing him the good or bad means of acquiring hundred sons, he as the preceptor ought to have prevented him from using evil means to attain the end. Thus it is concluded that he, who injures the innocent persons, goes to hell. These tendencies should be eradicated from the human heart.

There is yet another story in the Mahabharata which states that once the hermitage of a sage was taken over by thieves as a shelter to hide themselves from guards. The guards suspected the sage who was observing the vow of silence. They put him on sola (a long pointed nail), together with other thieves. The sage did not die even though he was not given any food for years and practiced the austere penance. One day this great sage enquired of Dharma about the unconscious sin he had committed and for which he was suffering such a punishment. Dharma replied that a little insect was once pricked by him with a blade of grass and the punishment was
Ahimsa in its positive form had been practiced in various ways in ancient times. Forgiveness has been highly praised in the Mahabharata. Yudhishtra asked Draupadi how she could afford to give up forgiveness that is an abode of truth, and wisdom.

What is forgiveness? It means not to return evil for evil but to keep patience and win the opponents by means of fortitude. Draupadi suggested Yudhishtra to give up forgiveness towards Kurus and show his might but Yudhishtra, the apostle of forgiveness, replied that the anger in this world was the root of all destruction. A man, dominated by anger, is unable to discriminate between right and wrong and as such might kill him who is worthy to be adored. A self-controlled man does not act against those whose anger has been excited so, and thereby saves himself as well as others, acting as a physician in case of both. A wise man who does not come under the way of his own anger, even though oppressed, rejoices in the next world for having treated a man of anger with indifference. According to the sage Vyasa, a wise man should always forgive his wrong-doer inspite of being in difficulty.

Anger makes a man blind to the real state of things and he loses his way. He who conquers anger attains bravery, skill, dignity, generosity and other accomplishments that a man of character is in possession of. Anger, in reality, is the cause of destruction of the world. No peace would have been possible among mankind but for the persons who are equal to earth in forgiveness. The Mahabharata exhorts the injured not to retaliate for their injuries, and forgive every form of injury. A man of excellence always shows his forgiveness even when excited, oppressed and insulted. Yudhishtra, in order to make Draupadi know the significance of forgiving, quotes Kasyapa, according to whom, forgiveness is virtue. Sacrifice, Veda, Sruti, Brahma, truth, accumulated as well future merit, devout penance, and purity constitute the substance of the universe. In real sense, forgiveness is nothing but a basic constituent of Ahimsa.

\[28\] Mahabharta Vanaparva, 128.15.28.
\[29\] Ibid., 29.15.16.
Vidura Niti and Ahimsa

Vidura, the preceptor in the Mahabharata, expounded Vidura Niti in the Udyagaparva. The theme of this treatise on ethics is not to injure others, and to treat others as one would like to be treated by them. Vidura says that kindness to all creatures is equal to the bathing in all the holy rivers to wash off one's sins and even then that kindness is still better.30 Vidura lays great stress on the nobility of mind as a noble mind is an abode of kindness and forgiveness.

The Mahabharata War between Kauravas and Pandavas seems to be a war between the forces of Himsa and Ahimsa. The fall of Kauravas is a warning to those, who strivell to attain material sovereignty with the weapon of Himsa and callousness. The triumph of Pandavas is a triumph of righteousness that culminates in Ahimsa and forgiveness. Forgiveness means not to retaliate, not to pay back in the same coin and that is what Ahimsa aims it. Forgiveness is said to be an ornament of both the strong as well as the weak. He who wears the weapon of love and peace in his hand, what can the wicked do to him? Just as the fire, falling on the fallow ground, devoid of any straw, gets extinguished by itself, similarly a person of violence, if met with non-violence, cannot but retract in his violence in the long run. Ahimsa is the cause of happiness, just as knowledge is the deepest satisfaction.

Vidura admires verbal Ahimsa when he says that he who does not speak harshly attains renown in the world. It is the forgiving nature that makes one of high family. Those who are of forgiving nature, stay like fire in wood, without showing outward symptoms. A man of forgiveness is, in reality, a man of strength and he exercises forgiveness at all times and at all places. The weak should forgive everybody and the strong should forgive for the sake of virtue. Himsa is the strength of the wicked and the vicious and forgiveness is the strength of those who are endowed with good qualities.31

In the Vanapravara there is the story of a fowler who possessed deep knowledge and who was well-versed in the art of life and had control over all his senses. He had knowledge of his previous birth and was destined to the present occupation only due to his own fault in his previous life. He happened to be a well-versed Brahmana in his

30 Ibid., 35.2.
31 Ibid., 39.70.
previous life and had the company of a king. On account of his association with a
king, he once killed a Brahmana who cursed him to be born as a cruel Sudra fowler in
next birth. Softened by his entreaties to be kind to him, the Brahmana relented saying
that he be born as a virtuous Sudra fowler waiting upon his parents.

Here is a lesson to the effect that to earn livelihood by the business of Himsa
that is by taking the lives of animals and lower creatures, is cruelty incarnate and
should always be avoided. Muni Pulastya says that he, who considers all creatures
equal to his own self, enjoys the fruits of the tirthas (pilgrimages).32

Ahimsa in the Bhagavad-Gita

The Bhagavad-Gita is regarded to be the cream of all the Hindu scriptures.
Whether it teaches Himsa or Ahimsa seems to be a controversial question, according
to some of the thinkers. The scenario opens with the episode of Arjuna laying down
his weapons under the influence of attachment for his relatives who had come to fight
for the Kauravas and whom he did not want to kill and prefers death at the hands of
Kauravas. He foresees disaster and becomes afraid of sin of Himsa.33 Finding himself
landed in a quandary, he requests Lord Krishna to tell him what is assuredly good for
him. Lord Krishna made him understand that no one kills anyone else or is killed by
it. The soul is immortal; only the body must perish after an interval of time. He
exhorts Arjuna to fight the battle that has come to him as a duty. Victory or defeat is
not one's concern. One should acquit oneself of this thought. Krishna not only
prepares Arjuna for war and Himsa but also tries to dispel Arjuna's infatuation. Arjuna
in reality refused to fight in the spirit of Ahimsa. He hesitated to fight against his own
kith and kin. The blessed Lord, knowing Arjuna's inner thoughts, advised him to fight
with the intention of dispelling his attachment and not to provoke him to any kind of
Himsa. He teaches us the way to destroy desires and Gita enables us to attain
readiness, detachment and self-control. It gives the clarion-call to action with no
attachment for its fruit. Ahimsa with other virtues is regarded as one of the
characteristics of righteous men.34

32 Ibid., 80.12.
33 Ibid., 45.45.
34 Ibid., 49.12.
Ahimsa in the Puranas

The Puranas mention Ahimsa as one of the twelve moral restraints (Yamas). A devotee is required to practice Ahimsa, truthfulness (satya), non-stealing (asteya) acceptance of what is necessary (Yavat-artha-parigraha), celibacy (brahmacharya) penance (tapas), purity (saucha), study of the Vedas (svadhyaya) and worship or Purusa (Lord Vishnu). Besides these compassion (daya), forbearance (titaksa) control of the mind (soma) control of the senses (dama) renunciation (Tyaga), simplicity (arjava), satisfaction (santosa), looking equally upon all creatures (samadarsik), service (seva), etc. are considered as virtues pleasing to God.

In Varaha Purana, there is a reference that an Incarnation of God says that one who abstains from injuring living beings (jiva-himsa) does good (hita) to all living beings, is pure (suci), is equal-minded towards all (sarvatra-samato) and who considers lumps of clay, stone and gold of equal value he does not take rebirth in the lower life forms. On the other hand, he who kills the living beings (bhito-himsa), indulges in adharma, enjoys bad company (asatasanga) has not controlled his senses (ajita-indriya) is passionate (kama-idoma), is greedy (lubdha) and attached to women (straina) he goes to hell. The Puranas have a devotional inclination, and they take Ahimsa to be one of the means to realization of God.

Further the Puranas praise the gift of fearlessness (abhaya-pradana). Absence of animity (nirvaira) peacefulness (santi) and equal-mindedness (Samadarsana) are among the merits of a monk. A definite nonviolent attitude is implied when it is said that those do not live long who take joy in violence (himsa-viharin) are cruel (krura) are back-biters (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.

Another view of Puranas regarding Ahimsa is that the human body is the giver of all the values (akhila-artha). Therefore, one should not kill. The body is the...
dwelling-place of duty (dharma-ayatana) so one should protect it carefully.\textsuperscript{38} Four types of living beings have been mentioned

1. Beings born out of womb (Jarayuja).
2. Beings born out of eggs (andaja).

One, who does not kill any of these four types of beings at any time, is of pure heart and compassionate. There are some beings who are so microscopically minute that they can only be known by inference. In Varaha Purana, there are references saying that one who considers non-violence the highest virtue, who is in the habit of having compassion (daya) towards all beings, equal-minded to all (samanya), is pure (suci) and is intelligent (daksa) he is said to follow the right path.\textsuperscript{39}

The virtue of Ahimsa is praised in the Puranas to such an extent that a person given to Ahimsa takes rebirth into a higher category. The Skanda Purana tells us the story of a king Puruyasa of Pancala country who even though very righteous in this world, had been in his previous ten births given to Himsa. In this tenth birth, he became a hunter. Although he was very callous yet once he helped the sage Karsana in regaining his consciousness by throwing water on his face and by fanning him with a tree leaf.\textsuperscript{40} On account of this virtuous deed, he was reborn as a king, but due to his heartless deeds in previous births he lost all and was reduced to utter poverty and misery. So activities devoid of Himsa and full of Ahimsa serve a man here and hereafter.

Similarly, there was another king named Pariksita who went to the river Sarasvati and saw a couple of cow and ox beaten by a king with a club in his hand. The bull white as a lotus stalk was so terrified that he was about to pass urine. The bull was tottering on one foot and was being beaten by the king. He saw the cow, the giver of all materials for sacrificial offerings to be quite helpless. She was kicked by the king and was bereft of her calf. King Pariksita saw her eyes welled up with tears. King Pariksita enquired of the king as to who he was. He looked at the king and found

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 2.15.38.
\textsuperscript{39} Varaha Purana 117.38.
\textsuperscript{40} Skanda Purana 1-57.
him to be a king in appearance only and a Sudra by deed. He also inquired of the bull and the cow who they were. Later on he came to know that the bull in reality was Dharma and the cow was Mother Earth in disguise. He understood that Dharma was deprived of austerity, purity and compassion and was overtaken by pride, attachment and intoxication. Kali, in the guise of a king, had grown strong enough to seize the throne too. Pariksita drew his keen-edged sword against Kali, the spring of unrighteousness. Kali knew his intention, threw off his royal guise, and fell at the feet of the king. King Pariksita was always merciful to the distressed. He smilingly asked Kali to quit his ground. Kali trembled and requested the king for some space. The king ordained dice, women, wine, and slaughter as his four cornered abode. Kali demanded more and the king gave him gold, as his fifth abode. Thus Kali, the father of unrighteousness, dwells in these five places. The above contents support the belief that Himsa and slaughter are the abodes of unrighteousness and a man of righteousness should abstain from the commitment of slaughter, i.e., Himsa. So svadharma (one's own duty) of a Paramahamsa, lies in quietude and Ahimsa.

Not only the slaughter of man by man but even the killing of bugs and lice is also forbidden. It also has been kept under the category of Himsa and one is exhorted to abstain from it. A man should not ever injure those creatures that are harmful to human beings but are devoid of discrimination. Such creatures have the means of living appointed by God and have no feeling, rather are not capable of feeling for others. To cause pain to such creatures sends one to andhakupa hell. There the person is tormented in utter darkness and from all sides by those beings (animals, deer, birds, serpents mosquitoes, lice, bugs, and flies, etc.) that were wronged by him. Thus, he is deprived of sleep and rest there. He wanders like one fallen in a detestable body.

THE SANKHYA AND OTHER PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINES AND NON-VIOLENCE

The Sankhya doctrine deals with the relationship of soul to the world of senses and seeks to analyze the ways and means on liberation of soul from the earthly processes. It is one of the six major philosophical systems of Indian thought. The other five are-the Nyaya system which interprets the nature of existence and meaning of life from a logical point of view, the Vaisesika system, which takes an

41 Ibid., 1.17.
epistemological standpoint; the Yoga system, which goes into the practical psycho-physical aspects of contemplation, the Mimamse system, which is primarily ethical and ritualistic in orientation; and the Vedanta system, which propounds a metaphysical point of view. All these systems are said to offer different perspectives on the nature of the integral reality revealed by the Vedas. The Sankhya system occupies an important place in the analysis of the tradition of non-violence because it constitutes the philosophical source both of Buddhism and Jainism. It has both theistic and atheistic versions and the proponents of its philosophy have always tried to link it with the perennial tradition of Hinduism, although, it came directly under severe criticism by the Vedanta philosophy propounded later in 400 A.D in the Brahma-sutra of Badrayana, followed by the commentary of Sankara who again restored monism (the Sankhya being dualistic) to its proper pedestal of glory. Many elements of this philosophy are present in the Upanishads. The major departure of the Sankhya theory from the earlier tradition is the rejection of the monistic explanation of phenomenal and the non-phenomenal realms of reality. It starts with the assumption of a duality between the soul and matter (it mentions 24 elements and this is why it “is called” Sankhya). The purusa, the non-material soul pre-existing since eternity is under this system of philosophy thought to have entered into matter (the prakriti) to experience freedom and complete independence which it assumes is not possible without this process. To make this process complete matter itself has to be activated from its state of rest. In man it constitutes the psychic soul consisting of the finest matter. Alongside of it exists the non-material soul. Matter is not treated as essentially bad or evil, it is said to have its own characters (gunas).

These are: the sattava symbolizing light (truth) goodness and peace, the rajas, representing activity and tension, and the tamas which represents darkness and ignorance. The fusion of the non-material soul and the psychic soul makes a new ‘body’ called linga (immortal psychic ego) which is born and reborn and participates in karma (activities). According to the Sankhya system the material or-psychic body is necessary for the liberation of the non-material soul which can be only accomplished through proper karma, through freedom from desire and accumulation of the sattava guna. Yoga and asceticism play an important role in this process of liberation. When this liberation is achieved, again a disjunction between the psychic
soul (emerging from matter) and the non-material soul takes place, the former returns, to the matter and the latter into a state of “blessed unconsciousness”. The Sankhya philosophy also conceives of world redemption when all the material souls are liberated from psychic souls, but such a return of all souls from matter is actually impossible. The rhythm of transmigration and reincarnation of souls goes on during each of world periods which are unending.

Thus, the Sankhya doctrine rejects the idea of the Brahman and monism which was later received by Samkara. It nevertheless, has played a very significant role, both as a new tradition of non-violence as well as a system of philosophy. The notion of the gunas as predominant in the Smritis and the Mahabharata (the Bhagvat Gita) draw a great deal from the Sankhya theory of karma. The Sankhya doctrine was the basis, from which the two cardinal sects of Buddhism and Jainism emerged and upheld the ethics of non-violence as the central element of their doctrine. Besides these, the contribution of the Sankhya philosophy to the theory of non-violence is itself substantial. At the philosophical level Sankhya treats all phenomenological action of man as a process in the achievement of peace (blissful unconsciousness) not only for the self but of a collective and an epochal nature: it postulates a theory of human nature which is dialectical and not monistic-fatalistic and sets for all human being a uniform life goal, of the cultivation of the sattava guna, the sublime nature; it lays emphasis on Yoga, which includes an attitude of asceticism and self discipline, and non-violence. There are also direct interdictions against killing of animal for sacrifices in the Sankhya-karika, which treats it as a sin. Although about animal killing for sacrificial purposes some exceptions have been made, the general rule in the Sankhya in this regard is of prohibition of killing (na himsyat), and the killing of animals even for sacrifices is said to lead to an unfavorable effect.

The other schools of Hindu philosophy also have emphasized the ethical value of non-violence. The killing of animals in the Vedic sacrifices has been commented upon in all the interpretations of these philosophies. The Mimamsa says that the killing of animals in general is bad, but an exception is made in the case of ritual sacrifices. The Vedanta philosophy as expounded in the various commentaries, lays systematic emphasis on a similar theory of non-violence. Samkara in his bhasya (commentary) on Brahmasutra where he propounds a monistic philosophy, explains
that the killing of animals for sacrifice, which is otherwise an impure act and leads to unwanted results, is not sin, because it is based on the scriptures.42 Like the Mimamsa, in the Vedanta system also killing of animals is tolerated for sacrificial and ritual purposes only. The orthodox viewpoint holds that the rites laid down by the Vedas have a sanctifying quality. The above view on animal killing as expressed by Sāmkara in the bhasya on the Brahmasutra is also repeated in his bhasya on the Bhagvat Gīta. In the metaphysical realm the Vedanta brought back the mystical monism of the Vedic Hinduism, and in that sense it made a positive contribution to the philosophy of non-violence by its emphasis on the cosmic unity of all beings in the Brahman.

The Yoga system of philosophy includes non-violence in a more positive way than the ethical systems. Non-violence is given here the status of a chief yama (self-discipline) required for the yogic cultivation. It is also used in a positive sense and not merely as a negative attitude of abstention. It is defined as a virtue to be cultivated without exception as to particular creatures and also without restrictions as to specific occasions or particular methods. Patanjali’s Yoga-sutra has references to ahimsa as a chief yama for the first steps in the preparation of an aspirant for yoga; these are the restraints that purify the mind from evil and clear the ground for yoga. They are of five kinds of which ahimsa is supreme.43 It also mentions the nature and types of violence which are contrary to Yamas and traces them to three causes, e.g., greed, anger and delusion.44 In the explanation of these three types of corrupting elements the Yoga-sutra makes it clear that no form of killing can be justified, not even for the sacrificial rituals. It shares with the Sankhya system the view that animal sacrifice is a sin and thus makes a radical departure from the Vedantic justification for qualified violence. It stipulates that ahimsa should be practiced in an absolute form without any distinction of class, occupation or occasion. Even the soldier and the fisherman have to abide by the ethics of non-violence.45 Non-violence along with abstinence from theft and avariciousness are among the “great views” which for the yogin are obligatory, unlimited by the conditions of life, space, time and circumstances. Of these, abstinence from injuring others has been, however, qualified. It may be

42 Sāmkara Bhasya on Brahma Sutra, 3.125.
43 Yoga Sutra 2.30.
44 Ibid., 2.34.
45 Vyasa Bhasya, 2.31.

determined by the life state of the persons, such as the injury indicted by a fisherman to a fish but to none else is condoned; similarly where one does not kill but on the sacrificial platform or to live, or in self-protection as on the battle ground, killing is permitted.

Non-violence in the Yoga system is thus applied in a relativistic sense, first, at the universal level, where it is not conditioned by time, place, work, situation, etc., called the mahavrata or “the great work”, and second at the specific level, where it is conditioned by the above situations. The theory of the mahavrata had a deep impact on Jainism. The atmosphere of the spiritual power radiated by the Yogins, who have taken the great vow (Mahavrata) have the power, it has been said, to transform into peaceful co-existence even mutually enimical beings (tiger and deer). Some scholars are of the opinion that the mahavratas were applicable to all members of society and that the Yoga sutra completely prohibits the killing of animals. But it appears that non-violence in the Yoga system has a qualified form. It is applied in a relative degree and not in an absolute sense of the “great vows” (Mahavrata). Non-violence towards animals finds indirect support even in the less predominant, hedonistic philosophy of the Charvaka system which ridicules the animal killing at Jyotistome sacrifice on the plea that from such sacrifice the animals go to heaven and, therefore, it is good for them.

In the philosophical tradition of Hinduism, the ethics of nonviolence finds strong and consistent support, because in almost all the philosophical schools abstinence from killing, cultivation of the positive virtue of restraint, freedom from avarice, etc. are considered to be the prerequisites for the spiritual salvation of man. These constitute the central theme of the Yoga-sutras. The most significant element in the new emphasis on non-violence is that it is not merely treated as abstinence from killing of animals but as a supreme virtue and moral quality in the direction of salvation. However, apart from the Yoga system even the Vedanta and the Sankhya systems of philosophy have emphasized the ethics of non-violence. The justification provided by the Vedanta for sacrificial killings should not mislead us to the conclusion that killing in general was sanctioned. It was qualified by ritual demands. More important than this sanction against killing of animals was the contribution of

both the Sankhya and the Vedanta systems to a new philosophy and metaphysics of non-violence. The Sankhya system postulated it by idealizing the freedom of non-material soul in a state of blissful unconsciousness through its participation in matter and worldly life. The theory of karma and rebirth was thus enunciated according to which the salvation of man lay in the cultivation of the highest individual virtue—the Sattava guna, or the quality of right perception, peace and spiritual values. The Vedanta metaphysics of the Universal Brahman, with implicit assertion of the identity of all souls and beings led to a humanistic consensus in the Hindu tradition which had a very significant bearing upon the theory of non-violence.


The Hindu tradition is sometimes divided into two major streams: one, representing the fundamental values or universals of the tradition which are enshrined in the Vedas and the Upanishads and two, the ethical systems, the normative structure and the values which have been clanging from time to time and are embodied in the Dharma Sastras or the Smritis (200 B.C. — A.D. 400). The aspects of non-violence both at the metaphysical and ethical levels as obtained in the Vedic tradition have been already discussed. The emphasis on Universal Soul as the source of all cosmic realities and as the primeval cause had introduced a kind of mysticism in the Vedic tradition of Hinduism which contained a rather broad and generalized foundation of non-violence. It existed in the form of cosmic love of nature and identity of all beings emanating from the Universal Soul. This metaphysical unity of beings reinforced the value of peace and non-violence at least in the normative system of the tradition. In actual practice, however, wars and sacrifices did take place. The Sankhya and other philosophical systems carried forward the same mystical and metaphysical interpretation till the doctrine of non-violence found a very systematic and practical ethical formulation in the traditions of Buddhism and Jainism. The Vedanta philosophy was a reaction against Buddhism and Jainism on the one hand and the Sankhya philosophy of dualism on the other. It restored the mystical-monism of the Hindu world view and at the same time synthesized the popular religion of mystical-theism which had been put in jeopardy by the Sankhyas. This it could achieve by making a distinction between the lower and the higher forms of Brahman, the former
suited to the men in the domestic life and the latter was for the yogins who cultivated the highest form of mystical knowledge. The Vedanta too, like the Sankhya, believed in the final submergence of all souls into the final and eternal Universal Soul. In this sense the Vedanta provided a synthesis between the popular religion and the esoteric forms of religious-mysticism.

The Dharma Satras represent a different aspect of Hindu tradition. They have embodied from time to time the social, ethical and political codes governing the life of the Hindus. In this sense, they very closely symbolize the socio-cultural and existential foundations of the society in which they were framed and were operative. The word “dharma” as used in the ancient Indian literature implies a systematic code of conduct for individuals in order to maintain the social order. It includes, “privileges, duties and obligations of a man, his standards of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of the one of the Varnas and as a person in peculiar stage of life.” Dharma, thus defined, has an ethical content. In the Dharma Sastras the nature of such privileges and duties as expected in various situations of human life and activities are prescribed. Similarly, the epics speak of various types of dharma, e.g., the Varnadharma and Asramadharma, the Deshdharma the Kaladharma etc. Besides these relativistic levels of dharma, there is also present an ethical concept of the Sadharan-dharma or the general obligations which have universal applicability. It consists of such ethical standards as abstinence from wickedness, non-violence, non-indifference, pity for all creatures, performance of rites, entertainment of guests, truthfulness, etc. Elsewhere in the Mahabharata and also in the Manu's dharma Sastra, dharma is defined as consisting of the ten highest ethical virtues, i.e., austerity, learning, self-sacrifice, faith, sacrificial ceremony, forbearance, purity of emotions and pity, truth and self-control. These are said to be the roots of dharma. Non-injury to other, beings and goodwill towards all have been considered to be the eternal duty of all men.

Non-violence finds high eulogies in various dharma sutras. The Gautam-dharma sutra states that compassion or love for all beings (daya), forbearance (ksanti),

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48 Mahabharta, 12.19.92-94.
49 Ibid., 12.161. 5-6.
freedom from envy (anusuya), purity of body, speech and thought and non-injury to sentient beings (ahimsa), these are the qualities of the soul and the person possessed of them reaches the world of the Brahma. All the major dharma sastras lay similar emphasis on the ethics of non-violence. All along in such references, non-violence is treated as a cardinal element of dharma, both in the epics and the Smritis. In the Mahabharata, non-violence is declared to be the supreme ingredient of dharma and it is treated even higher than the virtue of celibacy.

In the Mahabharata there are many passages explaining the nature of dharma or righteousness where it is equated with friendship and benevolence towards all creatures or as a principle which upholds the life of mankind or their advancement and growth and finally as an action that pleases others. Dharma is thus the principle of social order as well as individual code of conduct. Its practice is said to lead men to the truth that there is nothing nobler than humanity. Its practice creates virtues among men whose cardinal elements are mercifulness, truthfulness, forbearance and purity of mind. In the Mahabharata dharma is further related to high character (sila) which is one of the most important ethical canons of Buddhism. Sila is a composite of many virtues which also include non-violence.

Both in the epics and the dharma sastras the ethics of nonviolence is prescribed as a general virtue to be followed by all sections of society and the varnas. The adherence to this ethics is expected more strictly from the higher castes and people who desire the cultivation of spiritual values. It is treated as an indispensable trait of religious persons and devotees. Thus it appears that the doctrinal acceptance of non-violence becomes more specific, strict and defined as the nature of social hierarchy and spiritual aspirations change. The point is illustrated by the legend of the dharma vyadha or the virtuous butcher who is praised highly for leading a dutiful life by killing animals within the fold of his rightful vocation. The same action from a Brahmin would have involved greatest of sin and social condemnation.

51 Vishnu Dharma Sutra. 2.16-17.
52 Shantiparvam, 262.5.
53 Ibid., 91.16.
54 Mahabharta, 12.124.63-66.
55 Mahabhiarta Vana, 212-214.
The dharma sastras, the epics and the Puranas maintain a hierarchical criterion of ethical norms. There are general norms to be followed by all members of society but also there are specific obligations for each individual varna. It is here that the rules for the lower castes are more permissive even in regard to acts of killing of animals and eating of flesh than for the higher castes. Manu even prescribes the types of meats that can be eaten by the Kshatriyas and its effect on the body and temperament. This reveals the fact that nonviolence in the literature of the epics as well as of the dharma sastras had also a qualified acceptance. Its unqualified support was only in regard to that stage of life when a person wanted to renounce the worldliness as a recluse, mendicant or a sanyasin. Thus it also amounts to a reiteration of the tradition of non-violence as pre-established right from the Vedic times.

Both in the Mahabharata and the dharma sastras, violence is allowed under certain circumstances. For instance, in the Mahabharata it is allowed for the benefit of the village, as a token of loyalty to the ouster and for the protection of the poor and the helpless. It is said that for the general good and welfare of many, hardship can be caused to a few. It has been treated as justified for a king to take recourse to punishment for the establishment of social order; similarly a master, is allowed to admonish the servant, and a teacher is granted the right to admonish his pupil. The Bhagvat Gita itself advocates war in case of a righteous cause. In the dharma sastras Manu recognizes the right of the king to punish the criminal and has defined various forms of punishment prescribed-for various types of crimes committed by members of different castes. All the dharma sastras allow dandaniti (the policy of punishment). Legitimate use of force for the defense, and protection of people has been recognized. The king has been given powers in this regard, but it is qualified by the ethics of virtuosity and righteousness. The king is ordained to abstain from violence and not unjustly arrogates to himself what belongs to his subject. It is said: “As the earth maintains all creatures so shall the king maintain his subjects.”

These indicate the integral nature of dharma in the tradition of the epics and the Smritis. The same characteristics of dharma are also described in the Puranas. The

57 Anusasan Parva Mahabharat, 231.23.
58 Ibid., 227.3.5.
universal obligation of men is called manavadharma in the Bhagavat Purana which defines it as “harmlessness, truthfulness, absence of the tendency to steal, to be free from the passions of desire, anger and covetousness, activity in the direction of what is agreeable and good to being.” Almost the same virtues have also been declared to be the dharma of all the human beings by Kautilya in his, Artha sastra. Thus, the reappears tō be a great deal of consistency about the nature of dharma, in the law books, the epics and the legends other Hindu tradition; all of these agree on the moral basis of social actions of men. It is given to the spiritual freedom of man to transcend the barrier of humanness and mortality by righteous deeds: no distinction is made between the sacred and the secular form of action, since all activities fall within the compass of values or dharma. The distinction between the dharma sastras and the Artha sastra as separate codes for the moral and material spheres of human activities is correct only in a relative sense. There is no fundamental dichotomy in regard to value in the Hindu tradition, as all codes and ethical norms are traceable from the Vedas. Also because, both the dharma sastras and the artha sastra refer to moral as well as material activities of life. Thus, the monistic-mysticism in the Hindu tradition which emerged in the beginning of the Vedic tradition is maintained even by the dharma sastras. Within the prescribed limits as laid down by the tradition, all action is moral even that of a butcher. Dharma is not merely a social code devised by society but a Revelation. Both in the Mahabharata and the Puranas it is personified and in the Upanishads it is treated as a divine force guiding the behaviour of all entities.

Thus, there is a continuity between the Vedic concept of rita as the principle of cosmic and moral order and the concept of dharma as primarily an ethical order which emerged during the later periods of the Hindu tradition. In the Brahmans this translation is quite evident. In the dharma sastras, however, the concept of dharma undergoes a greater ethical and moral transvaluation specially as compared to the magico-naturalistic values that persisted in the Vedic conception of rita. Thus, a coherent worldview of the Hindu tradition is enshrined in the dharma sastras which also refer to the routines of daily life.

60 Taittiriya Aranyaka, 10.79.
Non-violence is given the status of a supreme virtue in all these texts. Among the dharma sastras the laws of Manu occupy a place of great significance in the Hindu tradition. The importance that is given to the ethics of non-violence in Manu is evident at many places. Among the many duties of the Brahmin is mentioned the strict observance of the code of ahimsa; he is not permitted to kill animals except for a sacrifice. He has to cultivate absolute purity of heart and mind, speak the truth and reply to insults by good words. Non-violence is also needed in the statecraft. A king may use legitimate violence but he himself has to observe a high standard of selflessness and non-violence. Even for a battle strict ethical code is prescribed. It is laid down that unequals in means and power must not fight; no treachery be used, no disarmed person might be killed. War is only allowed when all other means of conciliation have failed. Violence is considered by Manu a greater offence than ordinary crime and restraints are prescribed for parents and masters in regard to control of children and servants, respectively. For the salvation of man knowledge of Vedas, asceticism, self-control and control over passion and anger have been prescribed as the means. The ethics of non-Violence is thus; consistently found in Manu's dharma sastras. Some writers believe that non-violence is the chief concern of the Manu's.

Another important text embodying a social code is Kautilya's Artha sastra. It is primarily concerned with the Hindu polity and material order of human life. Hindu life has been defined as consisting of four types of pursuits, i.e., dharma (moral duties), artha (pursuit of material life), kama (pursuit of pleasure), and moksha (salvation). The dharma sastras and the Artha Sastra have similar conception of human nature since both the texts assume man's fallibility and susceptibility to sin and deviance. Manu says, “The whole world is kept in order by punishment; a man who is virtuous (by nature) is hard to find”. Similar is the assumption of Kautilya, who emphasized the need for effective control of the economic and the political order of society by use of force and foresight. The Arthasastra is primarily based upon the concept of danda which is the instrument of the prosperity (of the other three sciences) of philosophy, religion and economy; the conduct of danda is dandaniti

62 Manu 7.90-94.
which aims at acquiring what is not acquired; which guards what is acquired; increases what is guarded and distributes what is increased to the worthy.\textsuperscript{64} Artha is the subsistence of men and is equivalent to danda. Pursuit of economic activities of ordinary life by common people Kautilya calls varta and the same by a prince is called artha. Thus artha varta and danda are the key concept of the Artha sastra. He treats wealth, its earning and distribution as the central concerns of social polity, because it controls all desires. Of social polity, he gives four major aims, “to make acquisition and to keep them secure, to improve them and to distribute among the deserving the profits of improvements.”\textsuperscript{65} It is a logical corollary of these to emphasize the role of state and the king in the management of the affairs of the society. Kautilya talks of the matsya nyaya (the logic of the fish) where the strong fish eats the weak to be also applicable for societies and nations. Apparently, it points towards norms which may appear inconsistent with the traditions of non-violence since it emphasizes material power and force. However, violence is qualified by Kautilya as he too believes in the operation of the dharma. In the Arthasastra, there is reference to the duties (dharma) to be followed by men in various ashram\textsuperscript{s} (individual cycles of life activities governed by canons of personal ethics). Kautilya includes among the general code of moral behaviour of men such virtues as harmlessness, truthfulness, purity, freedom from spite, abstinence from cruelty and forgiveness.\textsuperscript{67} He calls dharma the eternal truth pervading the whole of the universe. Thus, one finds that even in the Arthasastra the pursuit of material life is not completely detached from the moral codes and ethical norms. There are even references to non-killing and abstention from meat-eating. Calf, bull, milk-cow are not to be slaughtered. Nevertheless, the commitment to the ethics of nonviolence is not equivocal and emphatic. Kautilya refers to diplomacy in war with great practical insight.\textsuperscript{68} Thus, although Kautilya lays great emphasis on diplomacy and war in the practical realm of social polity, in the idealistic and moral sphere he too has emphasized the value of non-violence.

\textsuperscript{65} Kautilya, Arthasashtra, p.127.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p.47.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.8.
All these illustrations culled from the principal Hindu scriptures point out the fact that Ahimsa had been an indivisible element of Hindu ethos since times immemorial. Hindu seers and sages went to the extent of pleading mercy and kindness even for the tiniest life in the divine creation. According to them, Ahimsa causes prosperity and Himsa causes destruction.