Chapter 4 - Non-Violence in Indian Philosophy

The old civilizations of India were witness to many-sided developments in art, architecture, literature, religion, morals and science. But the most important achievement of Indian thought was philosophy. It was regarded as the highest goal of all practical and theoretical activities and essentially, one of the spiritual aspirations and obedience to the law of the spirit. This Law of Spirit was regarded as superior to everything else.

The history of philosophy is the history of man’s reflection. There are some principal sources of philosophy –

- Man’s curiosity about himself and his surroundings
- A desire to overcome all kinds of suffering

Man’s practical needs and his theoretical curiosity lead to philosophical activity. Philosophy is not to be identified with the problems of man, but with man’s critical reflections on his problems. The etymological meaning of the word ‘Philosophy’ is ‘love of learning’.

In its literal meaning, the term ‘Philosophy’ means ‘love of wisdom’. In a broad sense, philosophy is an activity done by human beings to understand the fundamental truth about themselves. It also includes human beings’ relationships with the world in which they live and their relationships to the world and with each other.

It is hardly possible to attempt a history of Indian philosophy in the manner in which the histories of European philosophy have been written. From the earliest times in Europe, thinkers came one after the other and offered their independent speculations on philosophy. Here in India, however, the beginning of the principal systems of philosophy have a

scanty record of time and it is hardly possible to say correctly at what
time they began. It is difficult to say how the systems were originally
formulated. A spirit of philosophic enquiry had already begun in the days
of the earliest Upaniṣads. The spirit of that enquiry was the Brahman.
The Universe is said to be the illumination of His knowledge and All
shine after him who shines. All this is illumined by his radiance.

In the West, philosophy is considered merely as an academic pursuit of
knowledge. In India, the seers have gained the vision of reality. In Indian
philosophy, the word ‘Philosophy’ is also referred as Darśana. But there
is a fundamental difference between Darśana and Philosophy. Darśana is
‘to see by divine intuition’, whereas Philosophy is, ‘the study of the most
general and abstract features of the world and categories with which we
think’.

4.1. Indian Philosophy as Darśana

The term Darśana leads to the knowledge of the self. The ultimate end of
Darśana is to know oneself. The starting point of Indian thought is its
emphasis on man himself. Darśana as not remained restricted to the
academic pursuits of understanding the nature of the ultimate reality. It
has transcended the narrow empirical barriers and seeks to realize the
highest truth. Hence, the term Darśana as applied to Indian thought
becomes significant.

Darśana in its technical sense means what is seen when the ultimate is
investigated. The word Darśana comes from the root ‘Dri ‘which means
‘to see’ and in Sanskrit, this term is used for philosophy. In Indian
Philosophy, the ancient seers of India have sought the solution to life’s

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105 R.V. Khedekar — the Vedanta- Philosophy and Religion, BhartiyaBook Corporation,
New Delhi, 1986. P 47
New Delhi, 1996. P 4
sufferings. The main aim is to investigate the conditions of suffering, for that they looked at the nature of man and the nature of the external universe. To find the causes of suffering and the means for its cessation is found in their *Darśana*, vision or philosophy.

Freedom from misery was considered by some, like the *Buddha*, as the state of *Nirvāṇa*. The *Vedantins* and also the Jain, gave a positive import to the state of perfection expressing pure bliss. They called this *moksa*. Indian philosophers gave importance to the path of self-denial and rejection of the pleasures of this world which is not out of the sense of frustration. But according to them, it had to be the supreme object of the attainment of the highest state of peace and bliss.

Divination of man was always the aim for Indian philosophers. They wanted to guide the people the important principle that the primary end of life was not just pursuing life’s pleasures. It had to be attainment of bliss as the ultimate objective. Such bliss was not merely pleasures of the sensibilities or surreal happiness in one’s life. This was a pure state when the soul was happy to partake in all enjoyments without any obstacles from the empirical parts of the world. Such enjoyment was considered real and the sole characteristic of the soul. This ultimate state of bliss for the soul was what was impressed upon by the Indian philosophers.

There were practical and speculative conditions to which Indian philosophy had answers for —

- In the practical sense, acquainting oneself with the ordinary pain and suffering, would result in one finding ways to overcome such challenges.
On the speculative front, man was born curious to understand human experience and this would lead him to visibly elaborate on the nature of reality and his own existence on the earth.

From the speculative incentive, there was an understanding and knowledge, derived of the reality of suffering and this was then used to try and overcome suffering, practically. The two incentives were thus considered complementarily, to become a part of ethics. Codes of conduct were then determined and Jainism and Buddhism markedly illustrate this.

4.2. Meaning, Philosophy and Ideology of Non-Violence

Violence is hidden in the transience of life. Every transformation involves some form of destruction and violence. Life is such that human beings cannot exist without disturbing others and causing some destruction of life or object. For example, one cannot survive without food. This implies that in obtaining food one cannot avoid harming and hurting others. In the struggle for survival, human beings have to resort to numerous forms of violence. Though violence is a part of life, without non-violence life will be miserable for human beings. So to understand the meaning, philosophy and ideology of non-violence, we must understand the meaning of violence and non-violence.

a. Meaning of Violence

Violence is described as a fact of life; even the ascetics could not support their lives without killing some living things.\(^{107}\) In the moral world, violence is the foundation of survival and self-preservation. No one can live on earth without indulging in some form of violence. The root cause of violence is desire and attachment. Any modification arising from such

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action is deemed a result of violence. Thus in the spiritual sense, violence means causing any state of physical or mental disturbance or modification. An act of violence includes the following:

- Specially hurtful words
- Thinking of harming others
- Mentally planning to cause harm to others
- Invoke fear and other negative emotions which make others angry

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.¹⁰⁸

The word “violence” means rough or injurious physical force, action or treatment.¹⁰⁹ The word “violence” can be defined to extend far beyond pain and shedding blood. It carries the meaning of physical force, violent language, fury and more importantly, forcible interference.

b. Meaning of Non-violence

The word non-violence or *Ahimsā* literally means non-injury, or more narrowly, non-killing and more widely harmlessness, the renunciation of the will to kill and of intention to hurt any living thing, the abstention from hostile thoughts word and act.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ https://enoxforddictionary.com/definition/violence
¹¹⁰ Monier Williams Sanskrit - English Dictionary Oxford. 1899
Non-violence has been translated into English by various writers as non-killing, non-hearted, harmlessness, inoffensiveness, non-cruelty, non-aggression, tenderness, innocence, goodwill and love.\(^1\)

In the *Chāndogya* Upanishad, there is an important *Vedic* statement regarding the meaning of *Ahimsā*. He who practices *Ahimsā* towards all creatures except at holy places, does not return to this world again.\(^2\)

In *Dhammapada*, it is mentioned about *Ahimsā* that – \(^3\)

- All tremble at punishment: all men love life, remember that you are like them, so do not kill nor cause slaughter.
- All tremble at punishment: all fear death, taking oneself as a comparison, one should neither strike nor kill.

In *Saman Suttam* it is said that, “just as pain is not agreeable to you, it is so with others. Knowing this principle of equality treat other with respect and compassion.”\(^4\) According to Patanjali’s yoga non-injury consists in the absence of cruelty to all creatures, in all possible ways and at all times. It is tenderness, good will and kindness for all living beings.\(^5\)

**c. Philosophy of Non-Violence**

Non-violence means abstaining from the use of physical force to achieve an aim. It is a philosophy, a principle, and a practice. In ethical philosophy, it upholds the view that moral behavior excludes the use of

\(^1\) Gene Sharp Dictionary of Power and Struggle, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012

\(^2\) अष्टवत्सप्तपादमार्गमहतिप्राप्तश्चतपमहतपिविद्यविद्याभ्यासमन्तरारस्य

\(^3\) *Chāndogya* Upanishad 8.15.1


\(^6\) Jadunath Sinha – Outlines Of Indian Philosophy, Sinha Publishing House Private Ltd.1963. P 304
violence. Non-violence as a philosophy can inform anyone’s actions, anywhere and at any time. Non-violence is an effective way of dealing with conflicting needs and thought. It includes lateral thinking, resourcefulness vision, planning, patience and commitment. Nonviolence is concerned with what kind of authority people choose to live under. The principle behind non-violence is that people should be free to choose, but other people should not be harmed.

Non-violence doesn’t deny the existence of conflict. This conflict will probably always be present in human society. But it does assert that no conflict should be dealt with using violence and armed force. Sometimes it is found that the philosophy of non-violence is rooted in the simple belief that God is harmless. Therefore, to more strongly connect with God, one must likewise be harmless.

Non-violence also has ‘active’ or ‘activist’ elements where the believers accept the need for non-violence as a means to achieve political and social change. The advocates of an activist philosophy of non-violence use diverse methods in their campaigns for social change which include critical forms of education and belief. It is expressed with mass non-co-operation, civil disobedience and non-violent directed actions.

To understand non-violence preached and practiced by Indian philosophy, it would be fruitful to answer the following fundamental questions, namely,

- What is non-violence?
- How can non-violence be practiced?
- What are the methods of non-violence?
- Why is non-violence the necessary objective of life?
All our thoughts become clear when we break up our enquiry into these four parts. It may be difficult to completely isolate one question from the others.

What is non-violence?

Non-violence is the practice of being harmless to the self and others. It comes from the belief that human beings do not have to hurt people, animals or the environment to get what they want, or do as little harm as possibly can be done. It refers to

1. A general philosophy of abstention from violence based on moral, religious or spiritual principles

2. Non-violent or harmless behavior

In Hinduism, Sathapatha Brahrnana Ahimsā is used as noun, as it has been said, ‘the womb does not injure the child and the womb remains uninjured.’

According to Buddhism, the term avihimsā is defined as ‘that by which another being is not harmed’.

The concept ‘non-violence’ is also linked synonymously with peace, pacifism and passivity. Since it considered as one’s choice to do no or little harm, it could be construed as being passive, at times. On some occasions, it could be different. To illustrate, if one is witness to a house fire, the appropriate but harmless action would be to put the fire out and not just be a passive spectator and watch the fire burn the house down.

\[116\] Unto Tähtinen—Ahimsā—Non-violence In Indian Tradition, Rider And Company, London, 1976, P 7

\[117\] Unto Tähtinen — Ahimsā — Non-Violence In Indian Tradition, Rider And Company London 1976, P 7
How can non-violence be practiced?

Love for the enemy is a fundamental concept of philosophical non-violence. The goal of this type of non-violence is not to defeat the enemy, but to develop tolerance for all. The philosophy behind this is to understand the love for all beings.

- Respect for All Approaches

All sentient and non-sentient beings get respected and revered to by non-violence. If this respect includes the practice of not eating flesh through abolitionism, or spiritual practices of doing no harm to all beings, it only emphasizes on the rights of all beings that live.

- Pragmatic Approach

The pragmatic approach to non-violence simply creates a socio-political campaign that affects social change without effecting anyone’s status. A strategic technique, this approach to non-violence speaks of the layman’s politics and works at making a change in the social struggle.

Based on the principle of separating the doer from his deed, stems the respect and love for opponents. This pragmatically justifies the possibility that doers change their behaviour and even their beliefs, irrespective of their actions.

- Living Approach

Practising non-violence means much beyond than just holding back from violent words or behavior, for some. This would imply overriding the impulse to be hateful and showing love even to those who strongly disagree. For this, an open heart and mind for all is key. Since all beings are interrelated, to love oneself would mean to love everyone but to hate
another would be to hate just oneself. Hence, unlearning violence and practicing love and compassion at every opportune moment would seem imperative. To some, the commitment to non-violence would bring along a belief in a fundamental transformation - that would spell justice, an abolition of harsh punishments such as the death penalty and a necessity to care for those violent ones.

➢ **What are the methods Of Non-violence?**

Non-violent action is a non-religious path to God that is based on the universal principles of inner peace and love for all. There are three categories that indicate non-violent action:

- **Non-co-operation**

Non-cooperation is the unwillingness to cooperate with the opponent and withholding the act of cooperation purposefully. Here, the goal is to bring to a halt a process, be it political, social, economic or industrial. Modes of non-cooperation that history has already seen include labour strikes, civil disobedience movements, economic boycotts, tax refusal and general disobedience.

- **Acts of protest**

Symbolic actions that are performed to show support or disapproval could be termed as non-violent acts of protest. Making the public aware is the goal with the message directed towards the public, opponents and the people affected. Such acts of protest can be seen in speeches, public communication, petitions, symbolic art, peace marches and other methods of public assembly.
• **Non-Violent Intervention**

Non-violent intervention is more direct as compared to what is seen noncooperation and acts of protest. Used defensively, such intervention can be seen when a non-violent struggle or attack is unfolded onto the opponent’s territory in order to offensively maintain an institution or individuality.

Usually the most immediate and effective of the three methods, Intervention is difficult to maintain and challenging for the participants involved. The strategies need to be chosen with care, taking into account the political, social and cultural circumstances. A sure-fire effect of non-violent intervention is to invoke the public scrutiny from the oppressors.

➢ **Why is non-violence the necessary objective of life?**

At a cursory glance, it may seem that violence has an upper hand at resolving conflicts and achieving the ends, as desired. Such a strategy is tangible and in the face. Non-violence is the more difficult technique to implement as it is laden with moral and practical challenges. It is non-violence that most skeptics should advocate for.

**Reasons for Non-violence**

There are many reasons that can be offered for the employment of non-violence. They are as follows-

- It is a weapon available to all.
- It breaks the cycle of violence.
- It leaves open the possibility of conversion.
- It ensures that the media focus on the issue at hand rather than some tangential act of violence.
- It is the surest way of achieving public sympathy.
• It is more likely to produce a constructive rather than a destructive outcome.
• It is a method to resolve conflicts resolution aiming at the truth of a given situation.
• It is the only method of struggle that is consistent with the teachings of major religions.

In addition, there are reasons for the employment of non-violence that go beyond the conviction that it is useful. Non-violence can be the basis for a way of life. It is consistent with a belief in the underlying unity of humankind. It is the only method of action which does not block the path of self-realization.

d. Ideology of Non-Violence is based on the Acceptance of Suffering

The ideological non-violence is based on the acceptance of suffering. By accepting, the opponent is confronted with a situation that requires a choice rather than a reflex action.

The voluntary acceptance of suffering is designed to purify the activist. It demonstrates the sincerity of the activist to oneself and also to others. Further, it is an appeal to the opponent and the uncommitted audience. In the dialectic of nonviolence, both the sufferer and the opponent are transformed as follows:

• The opponent - by being compelled to confront one’s own views on the truth of the situation which may lead to conversion
• The sufferer - who may be morally enriched by not compromising on fundamental principles
• Even where non-violence does not touch the conscience of the opponent it can still generate objective benefits in conflict situations.

• The opponent may be converted indirectly into changing the behaviour if consistent non-violence in the face of provocation moves the public opinion in favour of the activist.

• Ideologically, motivated non-violence is aimed not so much at changing the opponent’s behavior.

• It aims to change the opponent’s values which in turn will lead to a change in behavior.

• Changed behavior with changed values and attitudes can only be maintained by the philosophy of ideological non-violence. It aims to resolve the distrust and friction that may be the underlying sources of the conflict. This can lead to a clearer understanding of the self.

4.3. Non-violence in Indian Philosophy — Hinduism, Yoga and Buddhism

If himsa is as old as man, Ahimsā is as old as human culture. Ahimsā has occupied a pre- eminent position in Indian philosophy. It has been the first among the fivefold virtues which form the essence of Hindu ethics and are known by various names, such as Pañcamśīlā or Pañcamahāvrata. Jainism has placed it higher than truth. The Buddha identified it with universal compassion. It was regarded as equivalent to Dharma or the Moral Law - it was a necessary means to salvation and a vital part of the spiritual discipline prescribed by the teachers of Yoga like Patañjali.

Himṣa is described as a fact of life. Even the ascetics could not support their lives without killing some living things. Stronger creatures live upon
Weaker ones. There is no being in the world which is purely non-violent. Though violence is a fact of life, it can reduce or maintain it by moral approval. But violence must be limited to a minimum, because if all laws of nature were uncertain and undependable, the universe would turn into chaos. Thus, *Ahimsā* is the practical application of the great truth of spiritual unity. The sanctity of life and its inviolability are underscored in the principal philosophical systems which originated in India, namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Yoga.

Indian religious teachers have always regarded *Ahimsā* as the highest *Dharma*. There is no limit to its power. The psychology of *Ahimsā* is full of significance. It is a plan for self-purification, mass-purification and even enemy purification. It is an active principle of love. It is conscious suffering for the cause of righteousness. It is a way of life that makes the full use of the strength of the spirit.

T.W. Rhys David claims that *Ahimsā* was used for the first time as a noun in the *Chāndogya* Upanishad (3.17.4 in 7111 Century), where it described the enlightened person as the one who was non-violent towards all things except the victim; that is the victim of the *Vedic* sacrifice. In Buddhism, the concept of *Ahimsā* constitutes the first of five precepts or vows taken by both laypersons and monks. According to Vyāsa’s commentary, *Ahimsā* is a great vow or *Mahavrata*, it is universal and not limited by caste, country, time or circumstances. The great Indian teachers advocated the practice of *Ahimsā* in the religious sphere. It has the sole purpose of leading the suffering individuals towards a painless state.

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118 Article on *Ahimsā* by T.W. Rhys David’s Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol I. p 230
119 Vyāsa’s commentary on Yogasultra 2.31
a. Concept of Non-violence in Hinduism

The concept of non-violence which is known as *Ahimsā* has different meanings from one period to another in both the Hindu religion and system of philosophy. Just as ancient Greeks had keen interest in natural philosophy, the Indians also — through Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Yoga philosophy - had a special aptitude for seeking and living spiritual lives.

Hinduism recognizes the fundamental problem of human existence where to control violence is a challenge. So Hinduism recommends the practice of renunciation as the best solution to suppress the modifications of our own mind. Thus in Hinduism, non-violence is considered as the highest virtue. It can be attained only at the end of a prolonged spiritual practice. It will give perfection to self-control which will help make peace with oneself and with the rest of the world.

Hinduism offers a way of thinking which enables one rationally to understand the reality experienced by the Self. In this sense, it is an art of living and not merely a theory about the universe, it is meant for the highest aspirations of man. It is not for the discovery, but for realization of the true nature of things - faith, understanding and realization. 120

In Hinduism, the principal goal of human life is liberation. It cannot be attained until one becomes totally non-violent when a person transcends the need to hurt any life form such as living beings like plants, animals, etc. At the same time it is the one who can feel the pain and suffering of others and only then react to the culminating state of protection and

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qualities for liberation. In Hinduism, causing intentional harm to others in any form is considered sinful.

Those who reach the state of peace and silence through renunciation and detachment are considered the wise ones or Munis. They have the state of nonviolence in its fullest expression. They neither disturb nor feel disturbed. They remain in harmony with themselves and others. They live as if they do not exist. This is the highest state of non-violence, glorified in Hinduism.

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**Ahimsā in Ancient Vedic Texts**

There are differences of opinion about the concept of non-violence among the different systems of philosophy as Upaniṣadic seers devoted most of their time to finding the ultimate truth that lay beneath the visible world. They strived after and found identity between the highest principle that manifests itself which is known as the Brahma and the individual self, which is known as the Atman. They sought union of the Atman with the Brahma so as to attain liberation of the soul. In the process of this search they came to realize that doing good to others and living a virtuous life were preliminaries which can lead to achieving the highest goal of life. Non-violence was one of these virtues and requisites.

The word non-violence scarcely appears in the principal *Upaniṣad*, the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, dated to the 8th or 7th century BCE. It was one of the oldest *Upaniṣad* which had the earliest evidence for the use of the word *Ahimsā* in a sense that was familiar in Hinduism. A verse in it says, whatever penance, Charity, sincerity, the desire not to do harm and
truthfulness are, these are his contributions towards a symbolic sacrifice.\textsuperscript{121}

Another verse in \textit{Chāndogya} Upanishad says: He who concentrates all his senses in the self, he who is harmless towards all creatures except at holy places, he who behaves thus throughout his life, reaches the Brahman world, does not return hither again.\textsuperscript{122}

The Upanishad mentions \textit{Ahimsā} as one, though not ‘the first’ requisite. From the above discussion it will be seen that Hinduism has regarded the observance of \textit{Ahimsā} as a virtue. It does not allow it to stand in the way of one’s observance of one’s duties as Svadharma.

One Sanskrit dictionary gives three meanings of the word \textit{Ahimsā}:\textsuperscript{123}

Abstention from causing pain to others by speech, mind, body;

- Relieving living beings from pain;
- Refraining from causing pain to a living being in the way not enjoined by the \textit{sastras}.

The concept of \textit{Ahimsā} has its roots in the Hindu theory that every life is a spark of the divine and our recognition of the divine must be so universal as to identify ourselves with this divinity in every living being

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\textsuperscript{121} \textit{अष्टवंशपोदानमार्जवमहिषासत्वनासमिहिसमतासःस्यदिक्षणः} Ch. Up, 3.17.4
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\textsuperscript{122} \textit{सम्बन्धविश्वारुप्तप्रतिहितान्तर्भूतान्यत्वदिविवेषसःसःकल्याय ||}
\textit{वर्षिण्याध्वरुप्तप्रतिहितान्तर्भूतान्तःसःसःकल्याय} Ch. Up, 8.15.1
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\textsuperscript{123} Unto Tähtinen \textit{Ahmsa} —Non-Violence In Indian Tradition, Rider And Company, London,1976. P 6
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and, therefore, the least harm that one can do to life is all that is permitted.\footnote{V. Krishnamurthy - Essentials of Hinduism, Narosa Publishing House, 1989. P 16}

Hinduism places non-violence at the forefront of all, and at the same time, it recognizes the harsh realities of life upon earth. So sometimes, violence is justified in Hinduism. The essential need of violence is for the sake of order and regulations in the world as expressed in Hinduism, and also exemplified in the Purānas and in many incarnations of God. On different occasions, God incarnated upon earth to destroy evil in violent manner.

Violence is justified in Hinduism in the following circumstances:

- When the life of human beings or animal is sacrificed to God in a sacrificial ceremony
- When one offers one’s own life as a sacrifice to God.
- When one participates in a war either in self-defense or for a righteous cause.
- To punish evil doers
- To feed oneself by hunting etc., in times of famine, scarcity of food and starvation
- When the mind and body are subjected to austerities and self-discipline to achieve liberation

In all the above cases, violence is justified by Hinduism, only when it is an offering to God. It should be performed without selfish intentions and without seeking the fruits of such actions.
Philosophy behind Non-Violence in Hinduism

In Hinduism, there is no difference between the soul within a human body and that of an animal. Hence Ahimsā as a binding code of conduct implies a ban on hunting, butchery, meat eating, and the use of animal products provided by violent means. Most of the arguments proposed in favor of non-violence to animals refer to the rewards it entails before or after death, and to horrible karmic consequences of violence.

Ahimsā is described as a prerequisite for acquiring supernatural faculties, highest bliss and ultimate salvation. It is said to protect against all kinds of dangers. Hindu texts have asserted that lawful violence is, in fact, non-violence. According to Hinduism, sacrificial killing is not killing, but is meant for the welfare of the whole world. Non-violence can be understood in many ways in Hinduism. They are as follows:

There is a self-defense law behind non-violence

According to some interpretations, the concept of Ahimsā as expounded in the scriptures and law books is not meant to imply pacifism. In Hinduism, war is seen as a normal part of life and the natural duty of the warriors. Hindu scriptures and law books support the use of violence in self-defense against an armed attacker. They make it clear that criminals are not protected by the rule of Ahimsā. They have no misgivings about the death penalty. The criminals’ position is that the evildoers who deserve death should be killed. A king in particular is obliged to punish criminals and should not hesitate to kill them, even if they happen to be his own brothers and sons.
• There is a subtle form of violence

At a more subtle level, \textit{Ahimsā} is violated when contempt is shown towards another being in the following ways:

- By entertaining unreasonable dislike for or prejudice towards somebody,
- By hating or abusing another,
- By speaking ill of others,
- By backbiting or vilifying,
- By harboring thoughts of hatred,
- By uttering lies or
- By ruining another man in any way, whatsoever.

The subtle level of \textit{Ahimsā} is very important.

\textbf{Ahimsā comes from a Position of Strength}

\textit{Ahimsā} is not possible without fearlessness. \textit{Ahimsā} cannot be practised by someone who is afraid of death. With no power of resistance or endurance, it is a shield, not for the effeminate, but for the potent. \textit{Ahimsā} is a symbol and characteristic of the strong.

When a weak man is beaten with a stick by a stronger man, he cannot physically fight back. He may claim that he is non-violent, but harbors thoughts of revenge. This is not \textit{Ahimsā}. When a strong man is beaten by a stick but does not harbor feelings of revenge, then his claim of \textit{Ahimsā} is true. The true follower of \textit{Ahimsā} does not entertain any thought of retaliation or unkind feeling towards the tormentor. \textit{Ahimsā} is a paradigm of forgiveness.
• Non-violence as a Universal Vow

Ahimsā is a universal vow that is required for self-realization. It is something that is applicable to everyone regardless of their Varna or Ashrama. It is a necessity for anyone who aims to control the mind.

By nature man is non-violent, but when harmed, it is easy to get angry and want retribution. However, Ahimsā requires the elimination of reaction to anger. Rather, it requires the victim to change his perspective and no longer see himself as a victim. The practice of Ahimsā contributes greatly to the control of the mind control. Built like a demon with immeasurable power, the mind will do unlimited good if it is made subservient.

To understand the significant practice of non-violence in Hinduism, it is also important to explore the meaning of life. Life is considered sacred, synonymous with Divinity and marks the start, middle and the end of a cosmic continuum, according to ancient Indian thinkers. Typically, the Hindu belief goes that all that exists including water and trees, has consciousness and energy and that it must follow the Divine.

➤ Ethics of Non-Violence in Hinduism

In Hinduism, non-injury is explored as a way to achieve harmony. With this harmony man can achieve peace in his environment, peace between people and compassion within himself.

Beliefs, attitudes and actions interact to produce peace or violence. The Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣads says: “Here they say that a person consists of desires. And as is his desire, so is his will. And as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap.”\(^{125}\) Every belief creates

\(^{125}\) a Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣads IV. 4. ii. 6
certain attitudes. Those attitudes govern all of man’s actions. Man’s actions can thus be traced to his inmost beliefs about himself and about the world around him. If those beliefs are erroneous, his actions will not be in tune with the universal dharma.

“Where one’s mind is attached — the inner self

Goes there to with action, being attached to it alone.

Obtaining the end of his action,

Whatever he does in this world.

He comes again from that world,

To this world of action.

- So the man who desires.  

For instance, the belief that an all-pervasive Divinity exists throughout the universe itself creates an attitude of reverence, benevolence and compassion towards all animate and inanimate beings. This equals Ahimsā, or non-hurtfulness.

Ahimsā is certainly not cowardice, it is wisdom. This wisdom is the cumulative knowledge of the existing divine laws. Hinduism believes that every soul spiritually strives for peace. An individual can find total peace within himself. Again, this would begin at home. Peaceful homes breed gentle people. Such gentle people follow Ahimsā. This belief structure of each individual allows him to accept the eternal truths. Man thus

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126 Robert Ernest Hume — The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads, Oxford University Press Delhi 1995, P 141
continues to evolve into an instinctive, intellectual and super-conscious soul.

b. Concept of Non-Violence in Yogasūtra of Patañjali

The Yogasūtra of Patañjali is one of the most important works of Indian culture. Yogasūtra gives an intrinsic analysis of trance and description of the method by which it is reached. Its importance derives also from it being the foundational text of Yoga. Yoga philosophy plays an important and basic role in Indian philosophy.

The authorship of the Yogasūtras is unanimously attributed by Indian tradition to Patañjali, and it constitutes the basic text of the orthodox philosophical system of Yoga. The Yogasūtras do not give the impression of being a unitary text. The Yogasūtras are not original work, but are actually composed from many other texts derived from a plurality of sources. Now here is the teaching of the application that follows the sovereign theory of Vedanta, given in the Brahma Sūtra.

Definition of Non-Violence in Yoga Sutras

The control vows or moral precepts are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-acquisitiveness or belief in His Greatness and omnipresence.

In his commentary on the Yogasūtras, sage Vyāsa defines Ahimsā as the absence of injuriousness towards all living beings in all respects and for all times. He noted that a person who draws near one engaged in the true

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127 * अच्ययोगोत्तरामाणम् || Yogasūtras 1.1
practice of *Ahimsā* would be freed from all enmity. All these promote perfect *Ahimsā*.

When a firm footing in non-violence is established, the yogin acquires the power that in his vicinity towards the cessation of hostility from others. With non-violence influencing every thought, the yogin now has that aura that compels others to drop their hostile attitudes. Instead, they come near the yogin who seems to protect every other being fearlessly. That is the magnetic grounding that non-violence can have.

*Patañjali* regards *Ahimsā* as the yogi’s Mahavrata, the great vow and foremost spiritual discipline. This was not meant merely to condemn killing, but was extended to harm caused by one’s thoughts, words and deeds of all kinds. It also includes injury to the natural environment. Even the intent to injure or the violence committed in a dream is a violation of the principle of *Ahimsā*.

- **Concept of Violence in Yoga**

Vyāsa enumerates 81 types of violence. It has the following degrees:

- It can be done, cause to be done and permitted.
- It may due to greed, anger or ignorance.
- Its degree can be mild, middle or intense. These three degrees are again subdivided into three each: mild-mild, middle mild and intense-mild etc.

This counting is found inadequate because there are also degrees in compulsion, option and conjunction.  

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\[ \text{विनिधाहिःसाधवः कृतकारितानुमोदितान्तोभकोधमोहपुर्वका} \]

\[ \text{मोदमहायाद्वादुखः का नान्त्वकुलाइतिस्वत्रध्वपकावनम्} \] || *Yoga Sutra* 2.34
Moral lapses or anti commandments are headed by violence; whether done, caused to be done or abetted; are preceded by greed, anger or delusion; may be mild, middling or vehement. The contrary neutralizing thinking is that these result in sorrow, ignorance and endless binding or temptation.\footnote{M. R. Desai - The Yoga Sutras Of \textit{Patañjali}, Prin. Desai Publication Trust, Koihapur, 1972.P 221}

\textbf{Non-violence and \textit{Aṣṭaṅga}\textit{yoga}}

The principle of non-violence is implied in various \textit{yogic} techniques. The Yoga technique is supposed to be composed of the following eight parts: \textit{Patañjali}'s Yoga is rooted in virtue. Ethical discipline is very necessary for success in Yoga. Ethical discipline is the practice of right conduct in life. The two moral backbones of Yoga are \textit{Yama} and \textit{Niyama}, which the aspirant must practice in his daily life. Non-injury, truthfulness, Non-stealing, Continence, and Non-covetousness are the component parts of \textit{Yama}. Internal and External purification, Contentment, Austerity, the study of religion and philosophical books and Self-surrender to the Lord come under \textit{Niyama}. The practice of \textit{Yama} and \textit{Niyama} will eradicate all the impurities of the mind. \textit{Yama} and \textit{Niyama} are the corner-stones of Yoga philosophy.

Ethical excellence is the very foundation of spiritual life. \textit{Patañjali} begins to deal with Supra- mental existence and its achievement. He begins with \textit{Yama} (mind control in worldly life) and \textit{Niyama} (regularity in common life). So, 16 Sutras are devoted to the exposition of these two. Pre-eminence is given to abstention from injuring any living creature amongst all other virtues. There must be a non-injuring element in thought, word and deed.
Non-violence is placed first. The practice of universal love or brotherhood is nothing but the practice of nonviolence. Who practices non-violence will get quick success in Yoga. In the practice of non-violence, the practitioner must abandon even harsh words and unkind looks. He must show goodwill and friendliness to one and all. He must respect life. He must remember that one common self that dwells in the hearts of all beings.

The eight limbs of Yoga are described in the second chapter. The first of these is Yama are ethical disciplines. These commandments are the rules of morality for society and the individual, which if not obeyed could bring chaos, violence, untruth, stealing, dissipation and covetousness. The roots of these evils are the emotions of greed, desire and attachment which only bring pain and ignorance. Patañjali strikes at the root of these evils by changing the direction of one’s thinking along the five principles of Yama.

According to Yoga, violence is bound to decline when men learn to base their faith upon reality and investigation rather than upon ignorance and supposition. Violence arises out of fear, weakness, ignorance or restlessness. To curb it what is most needed is freedom from fear. To gain this freedom, what is required is a change of outlook on life and a reorientation of the mind.

The yogi believes that every creature has as much a right to live as he has. He believes that he is born to help others and he looks upon the creation with eyes of love. He knows that his life is linked inextricably with those of the others. He can rejoice only if he can help them to be happy. He

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132 *यमनियमासमन्नानामात्मनस्यायोांध्यायिनः ध्यानमाध्योऽपाख्यायिनः | * Yoga Sutra 2.29

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puts the happiness of others before his own. So he becomes a source of joy to all who meet him.

**Relation of Non-violence with Abhaya and Akrodha**

_Abhaya_ is a Sanskrit word which means fearlessness. _Akrodha_ is a fusion word a without non and _Krodha_ means anger which also means absence of anger. 133 Along with non-violence _abhaya_ which means freedom from fear and _Akrodha_ which means freedom form anger are also related to each other. Freedom from fear comes only to those who lead a pure life. In _Narada Parivarajaka (Athrva Veda) Upaniṣads_ states the nature of _Akrodha_ for a person who seeks self-knowledge and liberation as follows: 134 All cruel words should be endured. None should treated with disrespect. No anger should be directed in turn towards one who is angry. Only soft words should be spoken, even when violently pulled by other.

The yogi fears none and none need to fear him. Human beings are afraid of the future, which is unknown and unseen. They are afraid that they may lose the means of livelihood, wealth or reputation. But the greatest fear is that of death. The yogi knows that he is different from his body which is a temporary house for his spirit. He sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings. Therefore he loses all fear. Though the body is subject to sickness, age, decay and death, the spirit remains unaffected. He has dedicated his mind, his reason and his whole life to the Lord.

There are two types of anger, one of which debases the mind while the other leads to spiritual growth. The root of the first is pride, which makes one angry when slighted. This prevents the mind from seeing things in perspective and makes one’s judgment defective. The yogi, on the other

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134 K.N Alyar (Translator), Thirty Minor Upanishads, Madras 1914, page 138–140
hand, is angry when slighted. He is angry with himself when his mind
stoops low or when he deals with his own faults but gentle with the faults
of others. Gentleness of the mind is an attribute of a yogi whose heart
melts at all suffering. In him, gentleness for others and firmness for
himself go hand in hand.

Non-violence as the Power of Words

Non-violence means peace in words, thoughts and deeds. In the presence
of one firmly established in non-violence, all hostilities cease. 135 Words
have an incredible power. Having a life force of their own, they can
continue to live within a person for hours after they are said, and
sometimes, even years. Each time we speak we put energy into the words.
We are saying and giving them their own life force. The words than pass
to the person we are speaking to and become part of this person. Words
spoken with good intention, love and filled with good energy enter a
person’s mind like a beautiful flower. They bring light into the person’s
life, allowing them to grow and become a better person.

On the other hand, words with negative energy enter into a person’s mind
like a terrible weed. They take root and grow wildly blocking the light
out. It can take hours for a person to uproot one of these weeds.
Sometimes, they take such deep root that they affect a person for their
entire lifetime.

Now, with an understanding of how hurtful words affect us we must think
of how our own hurtful words affect others. This is perhaps one of the
most important parts of Yoga which gives the practitioner the ability to
become aware of his actions. Once he becomes aware of his actions he
must gain control over them.

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135 * अहिंसाप्रतिभाषांतांतत्तत्त्वानिधित्वाय: || Yoga Sutra 2.35
Non-Violence as an Intention

There is still one important part of Ahimsā and that is intention. Sometimes a person acts with love and only with good intentions, but his actions still are hurtful. He tells someone something to protect them or help them, but the words upset the person. No matter how hard he tries, the interactions with other people are so complex that he cannot always predict the outcome of his actions and he will unintentionally hurt someone else. The important thing is that all of his actions are done from love of the other person, from goodness and kindness.

The idea of good intention and not saying hurtful words must go together. Often, people say hurtful words and then justify these words by saying that they had good intention, that they only wanted to help the other person. This is usually associated with the idea that a person wants to teach someone how to be a “better” person.

Interaction of Non-Violence and the Universe

Ahimsā applies to the interaction not only between human beings, but also with everything in the universe. There is a connection between all things in the universe. So creating harm to anyone of them can put negative energy into the world.

In Yoga, the example of a lack of enmity in animals is used to illustrate the power of Ahimsā in such a yogi. Wild animals become peaceful in the presence of the yogi. The idea that Ahimsā can transform the surroundings, is an important part of the concept of Ahimsā. But the traditional concept of Ahimsā is connected with the concept of renunciation. According to this concept, perfection in Ahimsā is necessary for the attainment of liberation of those who had renounced society.
Non-Violence as the Power of Thought

Most people do not realize the power of their thoughts. Some people have very powerful minds whose thoughts are capable of affecting people around them. If a person carries on thinking angry thoughts about another, then he will release large amounts of negative energy directed toward that person. The reverse is also true. If he concentrates on loving and carrying positive thoughts he can have a positive effect on everyone. Praying for someone who is sick is an example of how a person is concentrating on the positive energies. Sometimes this can have a large positive difference in their health.

It takes a great deal of discipline to control one’s actions and words. This controlling is very advanced. Yet a yogi can follow a path that begins with one becoming aware of his actions and the effects his actions may have than learning to control his actions and words can eventually make him learn to control his thoughts. So, the principle of non-violence teaches that a yogi must be careful with his actions, words and thoughts so that no harm is done to others or themselves.

Violence is manifested in actions in words and in thoughts. Man considers himself non-violent but violence can work on very subtle levels. It has many disguises. Thoughts of guilt, shame, resentment and disappointment have a seed of violence within them.

Non-violence is unconditional love, it is true compassion that can transform the world. It can be achieved by learning to love and be loved: Yoga encourages us to meet our inner darkness impartially and compassionately. Yogic practice gives importance to meet the inner violence non-violently. It insists on that one expresses negativity without
hurting anyone, including ourselves, when the yogi learns to discharge his negative energies with positive intention.

To practise non-violence in action, one should practise non-violence in the mind. One’s own awareness can see the seeds of violence towards himself and others. Once he becomes aware, he won’t need to push it away, just recognizing it is enough. Thoughts come and go and Yoga insists on observing them, without reacting. Only this will create non-violence in our thoughts, speech and action.

**c. Buddhist’s Concept of Non-violence**

The principle of non-violence is one of the characteristic features of many ancient Indian religious traditions. Buddhism is indeed known to be the religion which regards peace and non-violence as its cardinal virtues as *Pañcaśīla*. The *Buddha* said that, there is no other happiness greater than peace. The ultimate goal for a Buddhist is to reach the peaceful state which is known as *Nirvāṇa*. To be a Buddhist, one is required to first observe the precept i.e. one must not take advantage of oneself or the others. While being natural towards all, one can embark on the spiritual journey of meditation. It will reach tranquility of the mind, so one can be enlightened and gain *Panna*. *Panna* means that one would have the insight or wisdom of seeing things as they really are. Buddhists call this realization or total awakening and enlightenment as the *Bodhi*.

The celebrated five ethical percepts are highlighted in some verses of *Dhammapada*, “He who destroy life, tells lies, take in this world what is not given to him, goes to another man’s wife and who is addicted to intoxicating liquors such a one digs his own roots in this world.”

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A Buddhist, therefore, promises to himself not to destroy or be the cause to destroy living being, which could be anything that is from an insect to man.

In taking the precept, a Buddhist recognizes his relationships to all living beings. This relationship is so close that the harming of any living creature would inevitably constitute harm to oneself. Everyone fears violence and everyone likes life. So man has to compare himself with the others. The precept applies to all creatures irrespective of size. Buddhism does not allow any sacrifice of living beings for worship. Morality in Buddhism is not founded on any doubtful revelation nor is it the ingenious invention of an exceptional mind but it a rational and practical code based on verifiable facts and individual experience.\footnote{Nerraj Gautam — Philosophy of Buddhism, Mahavir and Sons, New Delhi, 2009. P 68}

**Non-Violence And Mettā as a Brahma Vihāra**

This is the cultivation of loving kindness (mettā). A frequently recommended series of meditational subjects are the four divine abiding (Brahma Vihāras). Concentration on Brahma Vihāras - loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (Karunā), sympathetic joy (Muditā); and equanimity (Upekkhā) is believed to form an important preliminary in the Buddhist system of mental cultivation. Of the four, the meditation on loving-kindness is perhaps the most widely practised. By extending mettā towards others, goodwill is promoted and the heart becomes filled with love.
Concept of *Brahma Vihāras* in Buddhism

In the *Mahayana Maha-Parinibbanā Sūtra*, the *Buddha* teaches that the *Brahma Vihāras* are characteristic qualities of the *Buddha-Dhatu* (the all-pervading essence of the *Buddha*). He states:

“Great Benevolence and Great Compassion are the *Buddha-Dhatu* (*Buddha* — nature). Great Sympathetic Joy and Great Equanimity are the *Buddha-Dhatu*. The *Buddha-Dhatu* is at once the *Tathāgata*.\(^{138}\)

*Mettā and the Other Brahma Vihāras*

*Mettā* is one of the Four *Brahma Vihāras*. Brahma in this case has been translated as divine or noble. *Vihāra* means abiding and living. So those who practise these are said to be abiding or living in the divine or noble way.

The Four *Brahma Vihāras* are:

- *Mettā*: loving kindness
- *Karunā*: compassion
- *Muditā*: sympathetic joy
- *Upekkhā*: equanimity

These four are attitudes towards other beings and are also favorable relationships. They can also be extended towards an immeasurable scope of beings and so are called immeasurable.

In a way, the first three are different shades of each other. Compassion (*Karunā*) and sympathetic joy (*Muditā*) can overlap with *mettā* but not with each other. Compassion sees into the suffering of beings while

\(^{138}\) *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, Vol. 9, p. 59
sympathetic joy sees into their happiness. Mettā can be applied to both situations. Equanimity however differs in the sense of being detached. Karunā Bhavana is the cultivation of compassion.

In Karunā Bhavana, however, compassion is aroused instead of loving kindness. It is actually a more specific type of Mettā. It is applied when one is able to see the suffering of another. It is an emotion that arises when one can see another suffering, then feel sorry and have a strong wish to relieve the person of his suffering.

Mettā is applied to all beings and, as a consequence, one experiences another of the sublime states of joy which is true happiness in another being’s happiness. Mettā signifies friendship and non-violence. It is a strong wish for the happiness of others. Loving or kindness is a very specific feeling. It is a caring for the wellbeing of another living being, independent of approving or disapproving them, or expecting anything in return. Loving-kindness is the application of love to suffering. It includes “pure compassion” and involves experiencing the feeling of caring for another sentient being. All sentient beings desire happiness and not misery. There is no ground in being attached to some and hating others. One must develop a mind of equanimity toward all sentient beings to be a neutral person.

Ahimsā as a Rule:

The rule of Ahimsā is important for monks, nuns and lay people. It is against war and violence in society. Buddhism believes in this principle and speaks of the great philosophy of life. Non-killing is the highest virtue and it inculcates in the individual the noble idea of love for all. According to this principle, hatred should be conquered by love, and harm should be conquered by good. So it is said in the scriptures,
“Suffering disappears for him to the same extent that he gets rid of thoughts of harming anyone.”

_Ahimsā_ is neither a treaty nor a law made by human beings. It is in itself a natural law. However, humans must be taught this natural order. For this _Buddha_ made non-killing a fundamental condition for human survival. “Never kill” is the entire message of the precept.

This noble precept applies to the non-killing of humans, animals and other living beings. Life is dear to all creatures. This has got far reaching implications. All the living beings, irrespective of age, sex, size fall under this precept. So Buddhist ethics is not simply codified, theoretical or rigid. It is an action-oriented philosophy, the philosophy of “becoming”. It teaches us Right Action. It could be followed by all.

Buddhism judges the moral quality of an action mainly from the intentions behind it, rather than from its results — your intentions are within yourself, so you can gradually learn to control them, but you will never be able to control all the practical effects of your actions — so killing is also held to be worse the more energy and decisiveness you exercise when you kill.

**Compassion and Loving Kindness: The Core of Buddha’s Approach.**

The morality upon which Buddhist training is based does not come from following the rules without question but out of love and respect for all life. One of the most simple statement of this principle was given by Buddha himself:

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139 _Nirvāṇa Sutra, Vol. 9, p. 59_

Not to commit evil

But to practice good

And to keep the heart pure;

This is the teaching of the Buddha. - Dhammapada

Buddha always supported compassion as one of the highest virtues. Karunā or Maha-Karunā is an attribute of the Bodhisattva and the perfect Buddha. Sometimes it is also known as love, pity, mercy, compassion etc. Karunā is the life and soul of Buddhism. Bodhisattva shows his Karunā when he is consumed with grief on account of suffering of others and does not care for his own happiness. He loves all beings as a mother loves her only child. Only then can he lead all beings into perfect enlightenment.

Bodhisattva has to follow Karunā, but also attempt to analyze and explain it in a philosophical spirit. He teaches that it might be considered in two ways: realizing the equality of oneself and others; and also practising the substitution for oneself. When one cultivates the attitude of regarding others as equal to himself, then he must get rid of the notion of ‘I and You’ and ‘Mine and Yours’. So to feel joy and sorrows of others, he loves and care for others as he loves and care for himself. He is always ready to exchange his happiness for the miseries of others. He returns good for evil and even helps those who have injured him. Two of the most important qualities to be developed by Buddhism are loving

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142 The Mahayana Sutra Alamkara 19:17
kindness which is understood as the wish for others to be happy and
compassion which is understood as the wish to alleviate suffering.  

The renunciation tradition that promotes Ahimsā such as Hinduism, Yoga
and Buddhism focused on suffering caused by the interdependencies of
nature and the attainment of salvation. Ultimately, injury and non-injury
relate to self. So the ultimate act of Ahimsā is to avoid being reborn, that
is to attain moksa or liberation.

The vitality of Indian philosophy consists in their unique system of
thought and the conspicuous way of living. Spiritual life is the main aim
of Indian thought. But this is not feasible unless man’s process of
thinking, his approach and his way of life change. So the necessity of
Dharma arises. Philosophy, religion and dharma are interrelated and
complementary to one another as they all start with faith in the ultimate
reality and the attainment of Moksa. Ahimsā as a Dharma is most
complex and significant and its scope is wider than that of either
philosophy or of religion.

It stands for all purposes and ideals that shape the character of man both
as an individual and as a member of society. It is the law of right living,
the observance of which secures the double object of happiness as earth
and liberation or salvation in Hinduism, Yoga and Buddhism.

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143 Edited By Martine Batchelor And Kerry Brown- Buddhism And Ecology Motilal Banarsidass
Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1994 P 4