



Research Paper

Metaphysical Foundation of Non-Violence (The Jaina Perspective)

Dr. Alakananda Parida
Asst. Professor Dept. of Philosophy
Utkal University

Key-words

(*Anekanta vada* , *Syad-vada*, *Manas-ahimsa* , *Tirthankaras*, *Kevali*.
Epistemic relativism, *Dharma*, *Triratna*, *Darshan* , *Jnana* , *Charitra*)

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I. ETHICS & RELIGION :

Truth, love, non-violence, service, sacrifice, forgiveness are the fundamental concepts which are central to every ethical system. It is noteworthy that ethical system is either supported by a religious world view or metaphysics (philosophical world view). Religions by and large, take God as the ultimate entity that defines the relationship between Man, God and the Universe. 'Fatherhood of God' which is admitted in every religious framework, implies 'brotherhood of man'. Some ethical paradigms owe their justification to religious metaphysics. Religious ethics urges people to cultivate love and fellowship with one another as God is the supreme creator and we are part and parcel of that cosmic family. In religious systems the values like love, fellowship, non-violence, sacrifice etc, figure prominently.

II. ETHICS & METAPHYSICS:

The metaphysical systems also offer view of reality which defines the relationship of ultimate reality with created human beings along with other non-human creatures. One who subscribes to a particular metaphysical system is under obligation to subscribe to the ethical views as the corollary of the metaphysical system. Metaphysics forms the basis of ethics because ethics is all about relationship between man and the rest of the creation. The concept of duty and obligation on the part of man in form of love, service or sacrifice depends on the world view. In this sense, every metaphysical system has entails an ethical viewpoint as its corollary. As is the metaphysical system, so is the ethical system. For example, in the metaphysics of Charvak there is no room for belief in transcendental world or supra- sensuous reality. God is conceived as the creation of human mind. The life that one lives in the present, is the only life and the belief in a past and future life is considered to be superstitious. In such matter-centric metaphysics 'maximization of pleasure' is the ethical goal. This forms the basis of the 'ethics of acquisition'. On the other hand, in the Upanishadic metaphysics, everything is said to be the expression of *Brahman*. *Brahman* pervades everywhere. It is both immanent and transcendent. This forms the foundation of the 'ethics of renunciation' where it is claimed that the true fulfillment of life (enjoyment) consists in renouncing in favor of the other.¹ Thus it provides the rationale to the 'ethics or renunciation'

III. JAIN METAPHYSICS:

Jaina Metaphysics that Reality is multi-faceted (*Anekantavada*) forms the basis of the ideology of 'Non-violence' for which Jainism is known through the centuries. Jaina thinkers assume that reality is Infinite and every object has infinite characters.² Since human 'mind' is finite it cannot, in principle, comprehend Reality in its totality. Mind seeks to know the reality from a finite perspective. Therefore, the knowledge of the whole eludes the scope of human comprehension. This is illustrated by the analogy of the Blind men and Elephant. Since, blind men have their limitations, in view of the largeness of the elephant they cannot see the whole of the elephant. The only way to know the elephant is through tactual perception. So, the knowledge about the elephant is determined by the part of the body one perceives by touch. One who touches the leg says

that it is like a pillar, one who touches the ears asserts that it is like a winnowing fan and one who tries to know the elephant by touching the belly claims that elephant is like a wall. So, different blind men, because of their own limitations come out with different knowledge-claims about the same elephant forgetting that their knowledge is relative to the part of the body they touch. Only a person with sound vision is able to give a faithful description of the elephant and understands that the claims of different blind men are partial or relatively true and that every blind man is wrong in so far as one mistakes the relative knowledge as the absolute or partial knowledge about the elephant as the knowledge of the whole which accounts for the conflicting knowledge claims.. Similar is the case with the human beings who because of the inherent limitations of 'mind' cannot comprehend the reality which is Infinite.

Ideally, there shall be as many knowledge-claims about the same 'reality' as there are perspectives or frameworks. That means that all our knowledge claims are relative. The epistemic relativism takes the form of *Syadvada*. This is, in nutshell the non-absolutistic approach of the Jainas. Whenever one claims something to be true one has to keep it in mind that it is true from one's own perspective and it may not be so from a different perspective. This makes room for tolerance of the opposite views. Different metaphysical systems offer alternative explanation of the same reality from different perspectives. So, metaphysical viewpoints are not contradictory but complementary. This creates the mindset to tolerate a dissenting opinion. When one understands that what one perceives or knows to be true could be wrong one would be inclined to appreciate and understand the views of others. The attitude to learn from one another has its existential expression when one co-exists with other having differing attitudes and aptitudes.

IV. PARAMOUNT ROLE OF MIND :

'Mind' is the mother of action. Before we act in the real life-situations it is backed by thought in the mind. As is the thought, so is the action. When we accommodate the antithetical views of others in the level of thought we also try to co-exist with others in the practical plain. Tolerance or catholicity in the level of thought manifests in form of 'co-existence' in practical life. It serves as the foundation of the ethics of 'live and let live'. The interests at hand and opinions we form goad us to act in a particular way. When we try to be in the shoes of others we feel that had we been in someone else's state we would also have thought and acted in same way. That helps one understand the thoughts actions of others with empathy..When empathy is aroused within, one ceases to have sense of difference or hatred for others. Non-violence in the level of 'mind', makes one tolerant in the transactions in the world. Jainas talk of non-violence, in the level of thoughts, words and actions. The way we think determines how we talk and how act in real life situations. Therefore, they underline the importance of non-violence in thought. But non-violence in thought comes only when one has control over one's passions like attachment and aversion. Our likes and dislikes are determined by the intensity of our love and attachment. When these passions are controlled one becomes non-violent in thought. They go on to argue that the real violence in the world is less important than violence in thought because the idea of violence in thought has its expression in action. That is why non-violence in psychic sphere (*manas ahimsa*) is more consequential than the non-violence (*ahimsa*) in the physical sphere because the latter is caused by the former. So, there is more stress on control of mind which again demands that we should have control over our passions.

V. JAINA ETHICS :

There is no room for transcendental entity in Jaina metaphysics. The world is not created. As they believe in eternity of the world, there is no need of a creator or God. Though liberation is the supreme end of life there is no need to pray or invoke the grace of a transcendental entity. Jaina ethics underlines the importance of self effort through control of passions. Of course they take the *Tirthankaras*, *Kevalis*, the omniscient individuals as the role models in the ethical journey towards salvation. Therefore, they insist that the writings of the *Tirthankaras* and their conduct are to be taken as the watchwords in leading the life of righteousness

Faith (*darshan*), knowledge (*jnana*) and conduct (*charitra*) are taken to be three jewels (*triratna*). First of all, one has to have the strong faith in the reality of the ultimate state whereof man becomes free from birth and rebirth. Besides faith in the ultimate state, faith in the *Tirthankaras* is also a pre-requisite for leading an ethical life. But mere faith is not enough unless it is supported by knowledge. Faith makes room for knowledge. Only the ones who have the faith in the reality of the ultimate state and the *Tirthankaras*, can tread the path of *dharma*. Jainas define '*dharma*' as the natural characteristics. So, man being essentially omnipotent, can attain it. But before attaining it all that is needed is to clear the dirt which covers the brilliance of a soul which is potentially infinite and omnipotent. Faith is necessary for right knowledge and knowledge is the prerequisite for an ideal conduct of ethical person. One who really knows the truth cannot but be truthful. In this sense, there is an affinity between Jaina epistemology and Vedantic epistemology because in Vedanta it is said, - *To know is to be*. One who knows the Brahman becomes the Brahman.³ Cultivation of knowledge has its inevitable expression in the purity of conduct of a person.

VI. ETHICS OF NONVIOLENCE :

Love and non-violence are not different concepts but twin aspects of the same concept. When there is a perception that soul resides in an ant, in a mammoth elephant and in human beings as well, it generates the love and compassion for every created entity. Non-violence has rigorous undertone in Jainism because Jainism is known for its message of non-violence in thought, word and action. When one who looks at the life of the Jaina monks one finds how puritanic and rigorous they are. Non-violence in Jainism doesn't have a negative connotation. Love is indicative of psychic state and non-violence as its manifestation in conduct. So, thought and action are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, a person who has love and compassion for the creation cannot but be non-violent. Non-violence remains as the inner compulsion for a person who subscribes to the ideology of 'Love'. As every living entity is potentially infinite it is the worthy object of our love and compassion.

While elucidating the notion of 'non-violence' they maintain that 'violence' does not merely consist in making injury or making harm in the real life situations. What eventually matters is note that one has to overcome the sense of violence in thought. One has to be always vigilant so that there is no room for the thought of ill feeling or violence towards others. Violence makes the 'Self' impure and is responsible for bondage which takes place when the flow of Karmic dross (*asrava*) envelopes the brilliance of the soul. Just as a person who is out to kill others by burning an iron, first burns himself, a person who is ignorant, brings suffering to oneself before inflicting suffering on others. Non-violence in the level of mind is accorded more importance than non-violence in action. The feeling of non-violence in the 'psyche' has its natural expression in our mode of living. and non-violence can be best avoided by avoiding the feelings of attachment and aversion. In Jaina ethics, 'non-violence' is not limited to the acts of non-injury but relevant in the domain of social interaction. Non-violence makes room for independence in thought and speech which paves the way for Democracy or a free society where people live the life of mutuality and tolerance with each other. Violence is to be eschewed on pragmatic considerations because it benefits none and Non-violence turns out to be expedient both in personal and collective life

Jainas underline one hundred eight kinds of violence. First of all, violence is three-fold in so far as it can be committed by a person himself or committed through others or committed by giving consent to it. These three kinds of violence turn into nine kinds when they are committed by mind, speech or physically. The nine kinds of violence have three stages such as thinking of violent action, making preparation for it and real commission of the act of violence. The twenty seven kinds of violence become one hundred eight fold if they are motivated by four kinds of passions. Thus, Jaina thinkers provide elaborate account of non-violence as part of their ethical mandate.

The concept of 'non-violence' for a house holder is less rigoristic than that of a monk. Non-violence for a householder is based in two considerations in so far as the householder has certain obligations for the family and has the necessity to procure the necessities of life. He has also to protect himself and the country against enemies. In order to earn, a householder has to opt for the means of livelihood but while choosing the option of livelihood one should try to minimize violence as far as possible. Sometimes, there is unintentional violence as the daily routine of life involves cooking which involve violence to others. Violence to some extent can be justified by way of self defense. The householder has to take part in war as a form of defense in the interest of the country

They appear to be non-compromising in denying the killing of animals for food' Even though food is the basic necessity of life one should take to only those kind of violence which are necessary for preparation of food. Therefore, merciless killing of innocent animals, meat eating are prohibited and vegetarianism is encouraged. Jaina ethics urges us to be vigilant about different stages of violence, such as premeditated violence when one is out to attack someone purposely and violence which s taken recourse to in defending one's life when it is under threat by an external force and Vocational violence in respect of which one does not have any freedom'. People at large, must embrace the creed of non-violence in thought, word and action in order to usher in world of mutuality and harmony.

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