

Nonviolence in the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions

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Introduction:

Religion is a human institution that makes sense to human life and society as it is situated in a specific human context. It operates from ultimate perspectives, in terms of meaning and goal of life. Religion does not merely provide a set of beliefs, but offers at the level of behaviour certain principles by which the believing community seeks to reach the proposed goals and ideals. One of the tasks of religion is to orient life and the common good of humanity, etc.

In history, religion and society have shaped each other. Society with its cultural and other changes do affect the external structure of any religion. And accordingly, there might be adaptations, even renewals. For instance, religions like Buddhism and Christianity had adapted local cultural and traditional elements into their religious rituals and practices. But the basic outlook of Buddhism or Christianity has not changed. Their central figures, tenets and adherence to their precepts, etc. have by and large remained the same down the history.

There is a basic ethos in the religious traditions of India, in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Buddhism may not believe in a permanent entity called the Soul (*Atman*), but it believes in the Act (*karma*), the prime cause for the wells or the ills of this world and of human beings. Indian religions uphold the sanctity of life in all its forms¹ and urge its protection. The ascetic traditions of India, namely Jainism and Buddhism, are realistic about the existence of misery in this world and its root cause. They also propose a moral path of purification and deliverance, like the Eight-fold path (*Ashtanga marga*) (right thinking, right livelihood, etc.) of Buddhism and the Three-Jewels (*Ratna traya*) (right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct) of Jainism.

¹ It is important to note that Jainism believes in the *plurality of souls (Jiva)*. *Jiva as pure consciousness is the same in all its forms. Jiva or life is common in all of them*, be they the plant, or animal or human person or higher or lower spirits. The intrinsic value of life is beyond comprehension. Hence life is sacred and all forms of life are to be respected and treated equally. *Tattvartha Sutra (Tat Sutra)*, 5.2-3: Comm. by Sanghvi Sukhlala, K.K. Dixit (trans.) L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, April 2000 2nd edition; Dulichand Jain mentions that ecologists, environmentalists and preservationists consider 'life' as sacred and this encourages movements for preservation of animals, etc. realizing the fact that every creature has its place in the scheme of nature. See *Jain Journal*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, July 1999, p. 51: Jain Bhavan Publication, Calcutta

The Hindu traditions are many and varied with their diverse and vast literatures and historical circumstances. But their ethics will greatly glorify non-injury to life. It is their prime virtue (*Ahimsa paramodharma*). More importantly, the whole of Jain-Buddhist culture is built on *non-injury to life*, briefly to say, *Ahimsa*. Jainism is sometimes called *the Religion of Ahimsa*. It is *Ahimsa* that guides both at the ideal as well as at the practical levels of conduct. All the three religious traditions believe that Injury to life (*Himsa*) is the root cause of all ills in the world. Hence these traditions urge non-injury to life as the means of achieving personal and social transformation. Down the centuries, *nonviolence to life* has acquired newer meanings in the social, economic, and political settings of India, particularly by persons like M.K. Gandhi, translating this great ideal into every sphere of life.

The following pages intend to show how these religions offer a suitable remedy to a *situation of violence to life and the environment* and how *Ahimsa* can be a means to build a New World Order.

1. We live in a world of violence, where nonviolence should make a sense:

Violence in the world is fathomed by attitudes and acts generated by selfishness, imbalance of emotions, and irrationality. It is all the time visible in the global human life, in nations and societies, and in reality. The human predicament in the contemporary world is the outcome of inequality and discrimination, poverty and injustice, religious and cultural (ethnic, lingual...) fundamentalism and prejudice.² These have been the sources of strong impediment to growth of an individual in society and society at large. The prevailing injustices in many sectors of economic, social, and political life, particularly done to women and children, are basically the outcome of intentional, attitudinal, emotional, and actual behavior, unwholesome and unhealthy. Hence, non-injury or *Ahimsa* becomes all the more important in changing these situations.

A. The economically poor and the discriminated sections of people:

Poverty and inequality affect the development of personality and they lead to inadequate resources, social illness, mobility and migration, to the risk of mortality. The economically poor realize a sense of improbability of achieving success in terms of values and goals of the larger society. Inequality, caste and racial discrimination, and poverty give birth to categories like the slaves and the untouchables in the world. In the context of India (and perhaps in other parts of the globe too), the statement of M.K. Gandhi³ on the untouchables is powerful: "Socially, they are lepers, economically they are worse than slaves. Religiously

² For the following ideas, I have largely depended on my book form of my doctoral thesis 'Dharma in Early Brahmanic, Buddhist, and Jain Traditions' published by Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, 2003 Chapter VI: Contemporary Relevance of Sramana Dharma, pp. 161ff

³ Gandhi, M. K: Harijan, 1954, p. 9-10

they are denied entrance to places we miscall 'houses of God'. They are denied the use, on the same terms as the caste Hindus, of public roads, public schools, public hospitals, public wells, public taps, public parks and the like. In some cases their approach within the measured distance is a social crime, and in some other rare enough cases their very sight is an offence. They are relegated for their residence to the worst quarters of cities and villages where they practically get no social service..."

B. The environmental hazards:

The humans live in close knit to nature and animals. They are necessary for co-existence and sustenance. But the growing pollution of nature and its water resources like rivers, ponds, lakes and even oceans, and the poisoning of the atmosphere with chemicals because of the high concentration of industries and factories, the throwing of garbage and solid wastes at people's convenience, the high level noise especially in urban areas that harms the human nervous system, the fumes from vehicles which affect even some sensitive plants like potato and some cereal crops and certain flowers... are but some of the results of the pollution menace.⁴

Deforestation is an ecological problem that affects human life and environment. As Prof. Walter Fernandez upholds, the human element gives meaning to ecology and the environmental question becomes relevant to society only when it is viewed in relation to the people who are affected by it.⁵ The reason is that ultimately, any eco-problem will lead to the intensification of poverty and destitution of the forest dwellers. The problem leaves them with non-availability of food, fodder, fertilizer, fuel, construction material, and of medical herbs, etc. Natural calamity and planned destruction of forests end up in large-scale migration and other related problems.

C. The problem of fundamentalism:

While discussing religious fundamentalism, Fr. Thomas Reese SJ, in his address to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission as Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), mentions why religious freedom matters: "The freedom of religion or belief is a broad, inclusive right that embraces the full range of thought, belief, and behavior. It is a conscience right which is not limited to the right to practice a particular religion. At its heart, it is the right to respond to the dictates of one's own conscience on matters of faith and belief, wherever that may lead, so long as the rights of others and essential principles of public order are respected. Thus, because freedom of religion involves freedom of conscience, it must include the right to a belief or belief system that differs from

⁴ Seshagiri, N: Pollution, National Book Trust, India, 1982, p. 6-11)

⁵ Walter Fernandez (ed.): Inequality, its Base and Search for Solutions, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1986, p. 57)

the majority or not to believe at all. Responding to the call of conscience is both a right and a duty. It is a right because human authenticity and integrity demand that people be allowed to live on the outside what they truly are on the inside. It is a duty because once people believe something to be true, they have an obligation to act and live peacefully in accordance with that belief.”⁶

Every country (and religion) has its fundamentalist tendencies. USIRF Annual Reports offer substantial evidences to these trends in most countries.⁷ For example., anti-semitism in Argentina, misuse or the abuse of the law on uses and customs in Mexico, xenophobia and intolerance, including anti-semitism in Russia, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Amsterdam, London and Rome, banning kosher slaughter in Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, banning infant male circumcision in Norway and Germany. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka said recently that there have been 190 incidents of anti-Christian violence since 2015, including at least 20 this year. Muslims have also been subjected to attacks. “The failure of the police to protect people subjected to violence is an abdication of the government’s duty to protect all citizens equally,” stated the National Peace Council, according to a June 5 AsiaNews report. The council added, “The rise in verbal and physical violence has been accompanied by public statements that Sri Lanka is a Sinhalese and Buddhist country with the implication that ethnic and religious minorities have a lesser place.”⁸

While religious freedom is in threat in most nations, India has been facing the problem of religious and ideological fundamentalism in the last decade. If one glances through the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reports of the past four years (2013-17) on India, one would quickly notice the Tier 2 position India is placed among several other ‘Watch List’ countries from 2009 onwards. The report clearly gives the reason for the status placed in the global order: “India is the world’s largest democracy, is home to a multitude of religious communities that have historically coexisted peacefully, occupies a key geopolitical position, and enjoys increasing stature on the global stage even as it faces violent acts of terrorism on its soil... Because the government’s response at the state and local levels has been found to be largely inadequate and the national government has failed to take effective measures to ensure the rights of religious minorities in several states, the Commission decided to place India on its Watch List for 2009.”⁹

⁶ “Freedom of Belief: Countering Religious Violence” May 24, 2017

<http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/May%202017%20Testimony%20TLHRC.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.uscirtf.gov/>

⁸ Catholic World Last Week (CWLW): <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/15cbc7258a902f8f?projector=1>

⁹ USCIRF 2009 Annual Report – Chapter on India

<http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/india%20chapter%20w%20gaer%20footnote.pdf>
(accessed on May 25th at 9 am)

2. Primary causes of evil:

While we are aware of the socio-political and economic reasons for the evil consequences on society and the environment, Indian philosophical and religious traditions reflect on the causes of evil and propose suitable remedies. There is uniformity in asserting root cause of all evil as the *desire to be* and the *desire to have more*. This desire is traced to egotism or the I-ness (*Ahambhava*), an attitude that results in the *acts of violence* in order to gratify oneself. For instance, stealing or grabbing from others what is not one's own, absolutist tendencies that do not allow other views and ways, etc. Thus, Indian wisdom would visualize the ultimate state of Liberation (called in different terms like *Nirvana* and *Moksa*) as a state of happiness and full safety to life, experienced physically and mentally as liberation from the adverse effects of karma by ignorance and cessation from all pain. Indian religious sources affirm that liberation is a *state of being good and content* after overcoming evil.

A. From the Hindu tradition:

The Hindu sacred texts (they are sectarian in nature and content) generally upholds dis-Orderliness (the opposite of *Rta, Order*) and attachment to the fruit of action as the root cause of evil. The Cosmos including the human and the natural habitat have missed the order of life and the norms of life. This order, expressed in society and in morality, needs to be kept up for the sake of sustainability of the earth, human life, etc. Missing the norms/moral order as set by the sacred texts (like the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Dharmasastras, the moral treatises), leads the individual and the society into chaos. For instance the Bhagavad Gita from the Mahabharata Hindu epic upholds the four-fold social class/caste norms (*Chaturvarnya*), failing which the society will end up in chaos. Arjuna, belonging to the Warrior class (*Kshatriya*) tells Krishna (the Lord): "In the destruction of a family (norms), the immemorial religious rites of that family perish; on the destruction of spirituality, impiety overcomes the whole family. By the prevalence of impiety, O Krishna, the women of the family become corrupt; and women being corrupted, O Varsneya (descendant of Vrishni), there arises intermingling of castes. Confusion of castes leads to hell and slayers of the family, for their forefathers fall, deprived of the offerings of rice-ball and water (libations). By these evil deeds of the destroyers of the family, which cause confusion of castes, the eternal religious rites of the caste and the family are destroyed."¹⁰

¹⁰ The Rig Veda speaks about the origin of society in the creation myth of the Purusha. The society forms part of the Purusha, the different classes of human beings originated from the various limbs of the Purusha, thus indicating a hierarchy within society. The Class system indicated in the Rig Veda is for the good of the society and has to be kept up with varied responsibilities and duties. The formation of groups in the beginning was on the basis of profession, given their interest (guna) and capacity (karma). It is only in later times that we find a profound conflict between classes. The Bhagavad Gita subscribes to the sustainability of society through the prevailing class/caste system. Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 1.40-43 (<http://www.hinduism.co.za/gita.htm#Gita%20Chapter%204>) This position is upheld by several prominent Hindu Law texts like the Manu Dharmashastra. Caste in India with all its ramifications and nuances of

The second important source of evil considered generally by the Hindu texts is the performed activities with selfish attachment (*Kamyā karma*). Our daily engagement with its deliberation and core attachment sullies our action and behavior. Even God in the Hindu tradition is portrayed as someone who performs his act, *detached (Nishkama)*. In Hindu philosophy, it is *desire (Kama)* that accrues the fruit of any action, tanning the person/soul with goodness and illness. This story is a person's spiritual journey, accumulating good or bad fruits until one's life-end. It is the final fruit that determines an individual's future. The Hindu texts would say that one needs to be free from all karmic taints, whether good or bad in order to enjoy the state of bliss and to put a stop to the cycle of birth and death. While works with attachment can be a source of commitment and development, the motives can be the sources of violence as well. For instance, deforestation has implications on development as well as ecological hazard. It can also intensify desire *Kama* in human beings to have more and to accumulate. All these have implications to pure intentions and nonviolent way of life.

The Bhagavad Gita speaks about the detached way of acting: "He, who does actions, offering them to Brahman, and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin as a lotus leaf by water. Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, mind, intellect and even by the senses, for the purification of the self. The united one (the well poised or the harmonized) having abandoned the fruit of action attains to the eternal peace; the non-united only (the unsteady or the unbalanced) impelled by desire, attached to the fruit, is bound. Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others (body and senses) to act."¹¹

B. From the Jain and Buddhist traditions:

Jainism describes the intrinsic nature of the Soul (*Svabhava*) as pure consciousness and it is nothing to do with anything external including egotism, desire, passions, activities, relations, etc. They are extraneous to it.¹² Hence realization of the *true self* is not possible without abstinence from all passions including passions that bring about all forms of violence. In the ascetic Jain and Buddhist traditions, *Violence (himsa) to Life in all its forms* is considered the heinous crime of all evils. Jainism maintains that it is ignorance (*abodhi*) and carelessness (*pramada*) that are causes for evil. Ignorance is perceived in relation to *Right* knowledge, vision, and conduct of the humans and carelessness is seen in pervert mental attitudes and forbidden activities, caused by alcohol, indulging in sensual pleasures, and unprofitable

relationships, unfortunately supported by the Hindu sacred texts, has been one of the sources of discrimination and violence in Indian society. It may have implications for similar thinking and practice of racial discrimination, and even slavery.

¹¹ The Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 5.10-13

¹² Samayasara, 2-3, 38: Bharatiya Jnanapitha Prakasan, vira samvat 2479:1971, (trans.) Prof. A. Chakravarti

conversation, among others.¹³ Hence Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, preached discrimination (*viveka*) and renunciation (*vairagya*).

In Buddhist ethics, it is once again the passionate heart, which is the primary cause of evil. The chief Buddhist schools like the Theravada school of Buddhism enumerate the following six as the morally defiling passions (*Kilesa*): greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), delusion (*moha*), conceit (*mana*), speculative views or heresy (*ditthi*) and doubt or uncertainty (*vicikicchā*). To these are usually added mental idleness (*thina*), boastfulness (*iddhacca*), shamelessness (*ahirika*) and hardness of heart (*anottappa*).¹⁴ Milindapanha, a Buddhist text, confirms this: “There are eight classes of men, Nagasena, who kill living beings – the lustful man through his lust, and the cruel man through his anger, and the dull man through his stupidity, and the proud man through his pride, and the avaricious man through his greed, and the needy man for the sake of a livelihood, and the fool in joke, and the king in the way of punishment.”¹⁵ All these amount to a single cause known as *desire* (*trṣṇā* in Buddhism and *kasaya* or *sticky* passion in Jainism). Both the Jain and the Buddhist traditions recognize *injury to life* as the ultimate cause of all evils. Suffering, pain, etc. are results of direct or indirect violence. For example, violence in thought results in social caste/class/racial discrimination, unequal income distribution, environmental disasters, and ecological imbalances.

3. The phenomenon called *violence*:

One of the earliest Jain canon (*Acarangasutra*) describes the phenomenon of violence and its root cause in these terms: ‘the (living) world is afflicted, miserable, difficult to instruct and without *discrimination*. In this world full of pain, suffering by their different acts, see the benighted ones cause great pain.’¹⁶ Similarly, the first sermon of Buddha in the Deer Park has all the elements of compassion (*maitri* or *karuna*).¹⁷ Prof. Das Gupta contends that both Jainism and Buddhism appear to have arisen out of a reaction against the sacrificial religion of the *Brahmanas* marked by a strong aversion to the taking of animal life and against the practice of animal sacrifice.¹⁸ Whatever may be the context in which these traditions evolved, the phenomenon of violence and the subsequent focus on nonviolence is the hallmark of Jain-Buddhist attitude, spirituality, and moral life down the centuries.

¹³ Williams, R: Jaina Yoga., London Oriental Series, London, 1963, p.230-231

¹⁴ Dasgupta, S. A: A History of Indian Philosophy, Cambridge University Press, Vol.1, p. 100

¹⁵ Milindapanha: IV.5.17 in Sacred Books of the East (SBE), Vol. XXXVI, The Questions of King Milinda, Part II, Tr. From Pali by T. W. Rhys Davids, (ed.) Max Muller, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965 (Reprint)

¹⁶ Acaranga Sutra: I.1.2.1 in SBE, Vol. XXII, Jaina Sutras, Part I, Tr. From Prakrit by Hermann Jacobi, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1964 (Reprint)

¹⁷ Vinaya Texts, Part I, p. 91ff in SBE, Vol. XIII, Tr. From Pali by T.W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965 (Reprint)

¹⁸ Dasgupta, S. A: op.cit. Vol. I, p. 208

A. Meaning of violence:

There are a number of synonyms to the word *violence*, given in any dictionary: malevolence, hatred, vengeance, enmity, murder, injury, war, cruelty, barbarity, torture, deception, rape, exploitation and so on. Of the 30 *Prakrit*¹⁹ equivalents or synonyms to the word 'violence' (*himsa*) given in *Prasnavyakarana*,²⁰ another Jain text, the following are considered important. Violence is destruction of life forces (*pranavadha*) by carelessness (*asamjamo*), actuated by passions like attachment and aversion.²¹ Any act of violence brings about deficiency of virtues (*Gunanam Virahana*) in an individual and the wheel of birth and death (*parabhasamkamakarao*). *Himsa* violates life-forces and destroys goodness and purity of the soul in an individual. In Buddhist tradition, destroying life *intentionally* is violence.²² In other places,²³ it is understood as cruelty, harming (killing), hurting, etc.

B. Aspects of violence:

Violence is both physical and mental. A person carried away by anger breaks the *law of love* and compassion. Jainism would make a distinction between the *intention* to hurt (*bhava himsa*) and the *actual* hurt (*dravya himsa*).²⁴ But when a violent act is carried out, it is both the inner self of a being (*bhavaprana*) and the outer vehicle of it, namely, the body (*dravyaprana*) is hurt.²⁵ If one acts carelessly moved by passion, one indulges in violence, whether a living being is killed or not.²⁶

The Jain dharma is so strict that even *senseless* creatures are reckoned instrumental in bringing about slaughter of living beings.²⁷ And those creatures such as the earth-bodied, etc. which have no development or mature reason nor consciousness nor intellect, nor mind, nor speech (those which lack judgement) are still full of hostility and wrong against all sorts of living beings. It may sound irrational and unjust to think how these *senseless* beings are held responsible for acts of violence. But the Jain spiritual masters say that with regard to the six types of living beings, from earth-bodied (one sensed) up to human beings (with the internal organ as the sixth sense), *Jiva* or that which has life is the same. It is due to wrong

¹⁹ Many of the Jain Canonical texts are written in *Ardhamahadhi* Prakrit language, a spoken dialect. The Buddhists' earliest Canonical texts are written in Pali, another spoken dialect of 6th Century BCE.

²⁰ *Prasnavyakarana*, *Pratamasrutaskandha*, *Asravadvava*: Ch. I, Sutra 2: in *Early Jainism* by K.K. Dixit, L.D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1978

²¹ *Tattvartha Sutra*: 7.8

²² SBE, Vol. XIII, *Vinaya Part I*, I.78.4 on p. 235 (Op. Cit.)

²³ *Dhammapada*: 129-130 in SBE, Vol. X, p. 36, *The Dhammapada – A Collection of Verses*, Tr. From Pali by F. Max Muller, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965 (Reprint)

²⁴ *Tattvartha Sutra*: 7.8, Dr. Surendra Verma calls them 'substantive' violence and 'dispositional' violence. He also enumerates other types of violence, such as by *mana*, *vacana* and *kaya* –mind, speech and body. See 'Meaning and Typology of Violence' in *Jain Journal*, Vol. XXX, No. 1, July 1995, pp.16-17

²⁵ Bhattacharya, H: 'Jaina View of Ahimsa' an Article in *Sri Mahavir Commemoration Volume I*, p. 161-162

²⁶ *Jaina Gazette*, Vol. 26, p. 77: Madras (1926-31)

²⁷ *Ibid.* 2.4.9-10

belief (*mithyadrsti*) that one commits sin of violence or does cruelty to other creatures.²⁸

Buddhist tradition pays greater attention to the *intention* of the doer. It posits five necessary *conditions* in the crime of killing: the knowledge that life exists, the assurance that a living being is present, the intention to take life, some actions must take place and some movements towards that action, the life must actually be taken.²⁹

C. Justification of violence:

C.1. Sacrifice and self-mortification:

Debates are aplenty on the issue of violence vis-à-vis nonviolence in particular contexts. Can one take away one's life in the process of saving oneself and/or others? How are self-mortification, self-persecution, etc. justified in religious/ascetic spirituality? Can a person harm oneself or others to safeguard one's own interests?

Hindu (*Brahmanic*) tradition accepts the sacrifice of animals and birds to secure prosperity and happiness to the owner of the sacrifice. Such sacrifices were even justified by saying that the victims will enjoy a better status in the life to come.³⁰ But it is argued that the same *soul-force* (meaning, *life*) is present and acts in all, and hence it is sinful to kill any kind of animal at any time and at any place. Generally, sacred Hindu scriptures (*Sruti*) do not give injunctions to kill. Self-protection is innate in every creature and the Self (*Atman*) has no narrow domains. The Jain masters, particularly Amrtacandra and Amitagati, maintain that it is wrong to kill even *poisonous* and *destructive* animals³¹ and preach *absolute* Nonviolence to Life.

Self-mortification or inflicting pain upon oneself does not result in pain in a religious and ethical context. It is a joy of offering oneself in sacrifice! To an observer, such acts might evoke sympathy, suspicion, doubt, illegal, and even anger. But the motivation offers tremendous satisfaction and joy to the one who is involved in such an act of sacrifice. In Buddhist tradition, there are examples of self-sacrificial attitude of a *Bodhisattva*, the *Buddha to be*. According to certain Mahayana texts, a *Bodhisattva* shows compassion (*Karuna*) by undertaking others' torments and agonies of the dreadful purgatories, and if need be, to lead all beings to perfect enlightenment.³² A *Bodhisattva* in the Buddhist

²⁸ Ibid. 2.4.3

²⁹ Narada Thera: p. 81 in A Manual of Buddhism, A Text book of Buddhism for the SSC, The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon, Columbo, 1951

³⁰ Manu, V.40-42 in SBE XXV, p. 175: The Laws of Manu, Tr. With extracts from seven commentaries by G. Buhler, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1964 (Reprint)

³¹ Purusarthasiddhyupaya: 79-89: Rayacandra Jain Sastramala Bombay, 1905; Sacred Books of the Jainas (SBJ), Vol. IV

³² Siksasamuccaya: p. 148 The story of Purna in *Samyutta Nikaya* explains to what extent forbearance of an individual can go. *Samyukta Nikaya* (Sam N), Vol. 4, p. 60 in C. A. F. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodward,:

tradition is the greatest forgiver and embodiment of forbearance. Even if his body is destroyed and cut into hundred pieces with swords and spears he does not conceive any anger against his cruel persecutors.³³

Jains undertake the vow of *religious death*, a practice called *Sallekhana*. This vow, described at length in Jain texts particularly the *Acarangasutra*,³⁴ is taken with an objective to fulfill what is known as the ascetic's or a wise man's death (*sannyasa marana/panditya marana*). This practice has been recognized by the Jain community as an aspect of *religious self-purification*³⁵ and it is highly commended for the monks/nuns and the laity. There is a long list of people until contemporary times, who have taken this vow of *Sallekhana*.

A Jain monk undertakes this extreme form of self-mortification when he suffers from a fatal disease or when he is unable to follow the rules of his Order³⁶ or when he is faced with obstacles to follow his religion. *Purusarthasiddhyupaya*, another Jain text, claims that *Sallekhana is not suicide* because the passions are attenuated. But he who acts with full of passion is guilty of suicide. The text mentions that there are *five desires* that are fatal at the time of this practice: desire to live, desire to die, attachment to friends, recollection of pleasures and desire for future pleasures.³⁷ It is both abnegation of desires and killing of activity in oneself.

Extremism is not accepted in Buddhism as it chooses the *middle path*³⁸ for its goal. Hence suicide is condemned without qualification: A monk who preaches suicide, who tells man, 'Ho! My friend! What good do you get from this sinful, wretched life? Death is better to thee than life' in fact preaches murder, is a murderer, is no longer a monk.³⁹ Buddhists object to thirst for non-existence (*vibhavatsna*) as they object to thirst for existence (*bhavatsna*). A saint must abide in indifference without caring for life, without caring for death. He will not commit suicide in order to reach Nirvana sooner. But there are many stories⁴⁰ to show that

(trans.) C. A. F. Rhys Davids (Vols 1-2) and F.L. Woodward (Vols 3-5), *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, 5 Vols, London, 1917-30

³³ Ibid: p. 103

³⁴ *Acaranga Sutra*, i.vii.6ff (Op. Cit.)

³⁵ The paradox between Ahimsa and Sallekhana has been well brought out by Mikal Austin Radford in his paper 'Sallekhana, Ahimsa and the Western Paradox'. Indicating the four main categories of suicides according to Durkheim, Radford says Sallekhana belongs to the second category, namely, the altruistic suicide. It is for the sake of *religion* that Sallekhana is undertaken by the Jains. See *Jinamanjari*, Vol. XI, No. 1, April 1995, pp. 24-25: Bramhi Society Publication, Canada

³⁶ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (ERE)*, Vol. IV, p. 484: (ed.) Hastings James, T and T Clark, New York, 1971 (Latest Impression)

³⁷ *Purusarthasiddhyupaya*: p. 177-178; also see *Tattvartha Sutra*, VII. 32

³⁸ SBE, Vol. XIII, *Vinaya Texts*, Part I, *Mahavagga*, I.6.17 on p. 94

³⁹ *Parajika*: 3 in SBE, Vol. XIII, on p. 4

⁴⁰ *Story of Siha* (*Therigatha*, 77); of *Sappadasa* (*Theragatha*, 408); of *Vakkali* (*Theragatha*, 350): (trans.) C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Psalm of the Early Buddhists*, 2 Vols, Pali Text Society, London, 1909-13; of *Godhika* (*Kathavathu*, 1.2): (ed.) Taylor, Arnold C. Pali Text Society, London, 1894-97; also see SBE, Vol. XXXV, p. 273f

suicide in certain cases may be the actual cause of or occasion for the attainment of an *Arhat*, a step lower than the ideal of Buddhahood. Mahayana Buddhism praises suicide as self-surrender and worship. The *Bodhisattva* of the past practised any heroic deed in that way.⁴¹

Religious suicide is approved in India. But it is significant to note that it has been in the case of men who have lived a full life and acquired a high measure of power. Suicide in other cases has never been authorized; rather it has been strongly condemned. In Buddhism as well as in every Indian system (except the Materialists, the *Carvaka*) it is held that suicide results in another life still burdened with the consequences of the individual's previous karma.

C.2. Duty and promotion of nation/social good:

Although Jainism is absolute about non-injury to life and living beings, yet it prescribes a practical way of life to the laity, who engage daily in unavoidable injuries to living beings because of duty and responsibility. History reveals that there had been Jain kings, generals and soldiers who, by duty, had to engage themselves in political wars. And the Jain spiritual masters do not call them *heretics* just because they had to engage in war and shed blood.⁴² Such illustrations such as *unavoidable circumstances* and *duty consciousness* allow violence. The Jains concede to certain activities by way of duty (for instance, punishment), etc. Buddhism considers punishment (*danda*) as *unattached violence*. The crime includes both punishment of criminals and waging a *righteous war*.

In Buddhism, a *Bodhisattva* can kill a person who intends to murder a monk or his own parents: 'it does not matter if I suffer in purgatory for this sin but I must save this misguided creature from such a fate.'⁴³ Harsh speech is sometimes permissible to a *Bodhisattva*: 'he may speak harshly in order to retain foolish persons from evil actions.'⁴⁴ While Buddhism is more liberal in its understanding of violence, Jainism holds on to its *ideal* way. For instance, it condemns *Euthanasia* or mercy killing. For instance, it warns against wielding a weapon in the false belief that those living in great pain ought quickly to be released from their misery. Even those who are suffering should not be killed.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Story of the future Sakyamuni giving his body to feed a starving tigress, Jatakamala, 1, Sacred Books of the Buddhist (SBB), Vol. I: (trans.) Speyer, J. S., 1895

⁴² Example of Chandragupta Maurya (4 Cent. B. C.); Kumarapala, King of Gujarat (12 Cent. A. D.), See Jaina Gazette, Vol. 12, p. 266

⁴³ Har Dayal: The Bodhisattva doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., London, 1932, p. 208

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 202

⁴⁵ Purusarthasiddhyupaya: 85

Generally violence is not justified except as a *necessary evil*, an evil done out of love, piety, pity or duty, and this is the most controversial part of the doctrine of nonviolence (*Ahimsa*). Questions are asked as to when violence is justified and in what forms and to what extent.⁴⁶ There can be situations in which the use of violence alone can set the process of transformation in motion. What is important is not to know whether violence is required or not, but to know whether violence is necessary at all or whether it is oriented towards positive, meaningful changes in the world order or whether its objectives tend toward its total destruction.

For instance, violence is not condemned when it is used to fight against unjust authority or to participate in military or revolutionary violence in order to attain social justice objectives, etc. To refuse to take relevant action while injustice does its work and subsequently the poor die of hunger is one way of promoting the unjust system. It is often violence of the oppressor that prompts counter-violence of the oppressed. Although debatable, in practical circumstances, it is violence that assures the defence of the poor and it is violence that stands in the face of exploitation, coercion and oppression by the rich and the powerful. Jacques Ellul says that remaining silent or passive in the face of evil reinforces evil.⁴⁷ In such instances absolute nonviolence, which religions may advocate, may not be even justified.

Indian history, even until M.K. Gandhi,⁴⁸ has accepted violence as a means to promote social good. The Hindu text *Mahabharata* says that of the two, namely, abstention from injury and injury done with righteous motives, the latter that brings in righteousness is preferable. There is neither act that is entirely pure nor any that is entirely simple. In all acts, right or wrong, something of both prevails.⁴⁹ Violence as such is ethically bad. But in life-situation the several aspects need to be weighed before deciding whether the use of violence is

⁴⁶ Ahimsa Voice, January 1990, p. 33

⁴⁷ Ellul Jacques: Violence, SCM Press Ltd., Great Britain, 1920, p. 33-34

⁴⁸ For Gandhi 'to cause pain or wish ill to or take the life of any being out of anger or a selfish intent is Himsa. On the other hand, after a calm and clear judgement to kill or to cause pain to a living being with a view to its spiritual or physical benefit from a pure, selfless intent may be the purest form of Ahimsa. ... The final test to its violence or nonviolence is after all the intent underlying the act'. See Young India, 4.10, 1928; As such, killing is not himsa when life is destroyed for the sake of those whose life is taken. See Sharma: Gandhi - As a Political thinker, Indian Press, Allahabad 1st impression, p. 52; Violence is admissible to Gandhi, (i) if nonviolence would cause the sacrifice of some other values of great worth like honour of women, freedom and honour of the nation, overall strength and growth of the race, or survival of democracy was at stake. See N. K. Bose: Selections from Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1948, p. 155, 156, 168, 170 (ii) if a sufficient number of people were not ready and could not be persuaded to believe in and practice true Satyagraha, violent struggles for just causes would be justified. Ibid. p. 169, 174 (iii) if there is a little prospect of the conversion of the oppressor to the course of justice through Satyagraha, the victims must defend themselves violently. The heart of the doctrine of Nonviolence is the principle of 'universal convertibility' i.e. the belief that all evildoers, anywhere and in all circumstances, can be persuaded to give up their course of evil if their victims practise Satyagraha. Ibid., pp. 159,175-177

⁴⁹ Mahabharata, Santiparvan: 15.48-50: (ed.) T.R. Krishnacharya and T.R. Vyasacharya (Kumbhakonam edn. 6 Vols, Bombay, 1906

justified as a mixed good. The whole situation may not be dominated by one, single ethical principle.⁵⁰

D. Practical Ahimsa: Countering the culture of violence

D.1. Checking our attitudinal bias: Ahimsa of the mind

In a globalised context of human interaction, *conflicts and harmony* are daily happenings. Human minds and the world seem to become more and more absolutist and dogmatic in their perception and engagement. The world forgets that there is an alternate way of viewing and responding. It overrules the fact that reality is complex and that no one position can describe a reality in its entirety. Our limited knowledge, grasping one fraction of these infinite aspects, tries to build a system.⁵¹ Such a *one-sided (ekanta)* attitude is compelling. *Ekanta* or one-sided approach is not inherent in the reality but resides in our mind. It is the product of intellectual discrimination, whereas, *anekanta* or multiplicity seeks to revert this mind-set.

*Anekanta*⁵² is the spirit of accommodation, a needed path to end violence in thought, word and deed. All knowledge would be fruitless in the absence of equanimity and no amount of reading of the sacred texts would lead one to any fruitful result. It is not without reason that Jaina elders have preached *anekanta* as the intellectual basis for the ethics of nonviolence. Social consciousness springs from this attitude and social harmony is possible through understanding the richness of this doctrine. In a specific context of conflict and violence, whether it is social or political or religious or familial, whether it is between individuals or groups or nations, the parties have to see the other's point of view, either by themselves or through mediation and arbitration, and through dialogue accommodate to the extent possible. Reconciliation is possible if opponents could understand each other through this mind-set.

Please note [a commentary by Eli Sasaran McCarthy on Gandhi at the end of this document](#).

D.2. Checking our unequal stand: Ahimsa at the ground-level

⁵⁰ Unto Tahtinen: Nonviolence as an Ethical Principle, Turku 1964, p. 66

⁵¹ The Voice of Ahimsa, Vol VII No. 3-4, p. 187

⁵² 'Nonviolent search for truth should inspire the inquiries of a thinker and Anekanta demonstrates a spirit of toleration, understanding and respect for the views of others' says Dayanand Bhargava in 'A Few Modern Interpretations of Non-absolutism' in Shah, Nagin, J.: Tr. Jaina Philosophy and Religion, English Tr. of Jaina Darsana by Muni Sri Nyayavijayaji, Motilal Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1998, p. 115; Jaina theory of Multiple facets of Reality and Truth (Anekantavada) Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2000; Ram Jee Singh has discussed about the relevance of Anekanta in Modern Times, Ibid., pp. 127-134

Jainism and Buddhism is said to be a reaction to the Hindu system of *social stratification* and to the authority of their holy texts called the *Vedas*. The social system was such that the *Brahmana*, the priestly class, occupied the prime place of honour. They were propitiated and consulted not merely in religious matters but also on every aspect of social and political life. Their authority was the authority of the Vedas. Their sanctity was the sanctity of the various gods. Their honour was the propitiation of these gods by way of gifts and sacrifices.

It is during the post-Vedic time (the time of the Upanisads and the great Epics) a drastic change takes place in the thinking pattern. For instance, there is a reversal in the traditional understanding of the *meaning of a Brahmana*. In the old definition, there are five requisites for being regarded as a *Brahmana*: the colour or *Varna*, the caste or *Jati*, recitation of prayers or *Mantra*, conduct or *sila* and learning or *panditya*. But the new definition what really makes a *Brahmana* is *conduct and learning*.⁵³

The Jain texts assert that it is *by one's deed* that one becomes a *Brahmana*: one does not become a *Sramana* by tonsure, nor a *Brahmana* by the sacred syllable *Om*, nor a *muni* by living in the woods, nor a *tapasa* by wearing clothes of *kusa* grass and a bark. One becomes an Asetic (*Sramana*) by equanimity; a *Brahmana* by chastity, a *Muni* by knowledge and a *Tapasa* by penance.⁵⁴ This *new definition* is also found in the life of the Buddha. To a question relating to the category of family (*gotra*) Buddha answered: 'I am not a *Brahman*, or the son of a king or a vessa; having taken a family (*gotra*) that of common people, I wander about in the world, without possessions, meditating. Clad in the *Sanghati*, I wander about houseless with my hair shaven, tranquil, and not consorting with men in this world. Inopportunistly O *Brahman*, does thou make enquiry of my family (*gotra*).'⁵⁵ It is not an exaggeration to imply from the above words of the Buddha that *ascetic way of life* is a protest against the tyranny of ethnic/caste/class system. An ascetic surpasses these categories or institutions of mundane life. An ascetic is free from the bondage and artificial restrictions of society, which a lay person might not transgress.

Hence the *Sangha* or the Holy Buddhist Order admitted all types of people, even outcasts and women.⁵⁶ Even the administration of the Order was similar to the tribal organization with democratic form of government especially in admission into the Order, regular meetings and consultations, authority and accountability among the residents, general governing of the Body, etc.⁵⁷ All these were prompted by the belief in *social equality* and understanding of hierarchy on the basis of conduct and experience. Hence any form of discrimination is a form of violence.

⁵³ Dhammapada: the whole of Chapter XXVI in SBE, Vol. X, pp. 396-423

⁵⁴ Uttaradhyayana Sutra: 25.31-32 in SBE, Vol. XLV, pp. 130-140

⁵⁵ Sutta Nipata: Mahavagga III.4 in SBE, Vol. X, pp. 74-75

⁵⁶ Paul Carus: The Gospel of Buddha, National Book Trust, India, 1971, p. 92

⁵⁷ Rahul Sankrityayan: (ed.) Buddhism - A Marxist Approach, pp. 25-29

D.3. Checking our drive to accumulate: Ahimsa in economic life of frugality and equity

The attitude towards wealth and riches among the Indian, particularly Jain and Buddhist religions was contemptuous. They were well aware of the transient nature of things and of the harm that these riches did to the moral progress of human persons: 'great wealth and women, a family and exquisite pleasures - for such things people practice austerities. All this you may have for your asking. What avail riches for the practice of religion, what a family, what pleasures? We shall become Ascetics (*Sramanas*) possessed of many virtues and wander about collecting alms.'⁵⁸

The Jain text *Uttaradhyayanasutra* portrays a dialogue between a father and his sons. The father tells his sons, 'the study of the (sacred text) *Vedas* will not save you; the feeding of the *Brahmanas* will lead you from dreaminess to darkness and the birth of sons will not save you... Pleasures bring only a moment's happiness but suffering for a very long time, intense suffering, but slight happiness; they are an obstacle to the liberation from existence and are a very mine of evils.'⁵⁹ Finally the father persuades his sons to embrace the *life of renunciation*: 'my sons, after you have studied the *Vedas* and fed the priests, after you have placed your own sons at the head of your house and after you have enjoyed life together with your wives, then you may depart to the woods as praise worthy sages.'⁶⁰

One of the major ethical principles of the Jains is *Aparigraha*, literally meaning *non-grabbing*. The metaphor generally refers to non-accumulation of wealth and simplicity of life. Several instances in the Jain scriptures point out to the deadly nature of wealth, persuading the believer to follow the course of religious mendicancy. Every attachment is a cause of sin,⁶¹ an accumulation of *karma* for which one has to reap the consequences. And hence the scriptures call for 'subduing desire by desirelessness',⁶² giving up the world, one's 'possessions and relations and all undertakings',⁶³ and become a wanderer and homeless without worldly interests, 'subduing one's senses'.⁶⁴

Such an attitude towards wealth keeps *Religion as priority* and *religious living* as the sure means to attain the goal of life. In the Ascetic *Sramana* perspective, wealth cannot give what is necessary to man: 'If there were numberless mountains of gold and silver, as big as mount

⁵⁸ Uttaradhyayana Sutra: 14.16-17 in SBE, Vol. XLV, pp. 63-64

⁵⁹ Ibid. 14.12-13, p. 63

⁶⁰ Ibid. 14.9, pp. 62-63

⁶¹ Sutakritanga: 1.3.2.13, SBE, XLV, p. 264

⁶² Acaranga Sutra: 1.2.2.1, SBE, Vol. XXII, p. 17

⁶³ Sutakritanga: 1.2.1.21-22, SBE, Vol. XLV, p. 253

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Kailasa, they would not satisfy a greedy person; for his activity is boundless like space.⁶⁵
 'Wealth cannot really save me: It is only a fool who thinks that his wealth, cattle and relations will save him; they him or he them. But they are no help, no protection.'⁶⁶

We find a similar attitude in the life of the Buddha⁶⁷ and the Sangha, the Buddhist Order. He also instructs the Sangha how a monk has to lead a life with frugal means.⁶⁸ The lifestyle of a mendicant provides the mendicants' way of life with rules for begging food, clothes, couch, bowl,⁶⁹ which regulates the possession of a mendicant. A householder, on the other hand, is in the midst of a world with vast differences in attitude and behaviour. When the worldly ways pose a challenge to a life of Righteousness (*Dharma*), a householder is at a loss to balance between needs and wants, between extremes of life.

D.4. Checking our egoistic and possessive mindset: *Ahimsa* and respect for nature

Aparigraha in the economic realm may mean non-obsession with material things or, simply, non-possession. *Aparigraha*, besides being a vow, implies an attitude toward life and the environment, especially nature and the material universe. Implicit in this vow is the great reverence to the autonomy of the material world. What we call wealth, possessions and the pleasures, etc. are *strictly* outside one's self but an extension of the self. They may be meant for oneself, the use of which helps a person for achieving the goal, but does not *really* belong to the self. This basic understanding comes from the idea that Jiva or Life is identical only with consciousness, and all other things like pleasures, activity, etc. are *extraneous* to it. This is the quintessence common to Indian philosophical systems. Hence *Aparigraha* by implication clarifies the *real* nature of the self and simultaneously the autonomy of the natural, material world,⁷⁰ which we ought to respect.

But is it possible for embodied beings to be completely detached from the empirical, material world? The *embodied* being itself is a combination of mind and body, spirit and matter and has an intimate relationship with the material world. This relationship could take

⁶⁵ Uttaradhyayana Sutra: 9.48, Ibid., p. 40

⁶⁶ Suttrakritanga: 1.2.3.16, Ibid., p. 260

⁶⁷ Paul Carus: Op. Cit. Ch. 8

⁶⁸ Mahavagga: I.30.4 in SBE, Vol. XIII, Vinaya Texts, Part I, p. 173 Buddha distinguishes what is normal to a monk's life and what are extra allowances.

⁶⁹ Acaranga Sutra: 2.1.2.5-7, SBE, Vol. XXII, pp. 93-94

⁷⁰ *Aparigraha*, detachment or non-possession, resolves economic inequality, maintains inner peace of the individual and society. See Sagarmal Jain in his paper 'Jaina Concept of Peace' in Jain Journal, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, January 1995, pp. 107-108; *Ahimsa* and *Aparigraha* are the twin-virtues that respects the autonomy of the material universe with all types of living beings. Integral salvation that embraces the freedom of all creatures from the clutches of the evil demands an attitude of reverence toward life-principle in each being. See Vincent Sekhar: 'Implications of *Ahimsa* on Ecology – A Jaina Perspective' in Jain Journal, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, 1993, p. 96; also see the same author in 'Significance of Jain Philosophy for preserving Life and Environment' in Thottakara, A: (ed.) *Eco-dynamics of Religion – Thoughts for the Third Millennium*, Journal of Dharma & Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2000, p. 125

the form of either domination or mutual assimilation or collaboration. One has to be discriminate in the use of things. The principle of *Tantum Quantum*⁷¹ will suggest how a person has to deal with the material world. It calls for a healthy engagement with the material universe and the environment with *active indifference*. Non-attachment helps one in achieving mental equanimity and allows a form of ownership not by grabbing but by mutual acceptance.

Any possession out of greed and other passions would come under violence to the material world. The Jaina teacher Amitagati⁷² points out that violence is committed for the sake of accumulation of wealth and attachment to possession. Ownership is exercised in the possession of land, house, jewels, money, livestock, servants and other luxury items. Attachment to wealth could be seen when one is found extremely sad at a loss incurred in some transaction. Hence a householder should constantly try to limit his activity to obtain possessions. Overloading animals (in an agrarian society) or extracting more work from servants, etc. is an illustration to this.⁷³ Possessiveness is evident when one takes things that are not one's own or when not given,⁷⁴ when dealing with illicit business,⁷⁵ indulging in adulteration, use of false weights and measures⁷⁶ and writing false statements or forgery, etc.⁷⁷

Subsequently, there are several vows that householders take in order to minimize violence by choosing a profession that involves *least violence* to sub-human beings,⁷⁸ *least violence* to one's partners in business, one's servants, customers, etc. For instance, a Jain householder takes the vow *to restrict one's movements and the use of objects*, minimizing one's greed and attachment. The vow includes certain types of food, conveyance, dress, etc. Religiously motivated Indians give utmost importance to Fasting on different occasions and days. The practice of *gift offering* or *Dana* in Indian religions further helps in minimizing attachment to the material world.⁷⁹ Generally the Jain and Buddhist householders gift their monks and nuns with food and drink, clothes, blankets, bedding and other necessary accessories according to certain prescriptions. The Jains mention four types of *gift-giving*: Food (*ahara*),

⁷¹ *Tantum Quantum* or "as much as strictly necessary for use" is a spiritual principle given by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the Founder of the Jesuit Order. It aims at the discriminate use of things, saving a person from greed, from the temptation to grab, to accumulate and to dominate over things, etc.

⁷² Dasavaikalika Sutra: 6.20 Trans and notes by Lalwani, K.C., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973

⁷³ Ratnakarandaka Sravakacara: 62 of Samatabhadra, with commentary of Prabhacandra Manikacandra Digambara Jaina Granthamala, no.24, Bombay, 1926

⁷⁴ Ibid., 57

⁷⁵ Sarvartha Siddhi: 7.27 of Pujiyapada with Tattvartha Sutra of Umasawmi, Sanskrit text with Hindi translation by Phool Chand Sddhanta Sastri, Varanasi (BJP), 1971

⁷⁶ Tattvartha Sutra: 7.22 Op. Cit.

⁷⁷ Upasaka Dasanga: 1.46: (ed.) Kankaiyalal, Rajkota, 1961

⁷⁸ Fifteen forbidden trades are listed in Sagaradharmamrta of Asadhara, see Williams, R: Op. Cit. pp.117-121

⁷⁹ The giver represents in an imperfect manner the perfect, self-emptying character of the Jina while offering something. See, Lawrence A. Babb: Ascetics and Kings in a Jain Ritual Culture, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1998, pp. 190-193

protection (*abhaya*), knowledge (*sastra*) and medicine (*bhaisajya*). Like other meritorious acts, it can contribute to the extinction of vice and growth in virtue.

For a Buddhist lay person, the practice of generosity consists largely in remunerating the monk's services to villagers. Thus a lay person gains merit by giving food, robes, money (often to the head of monasteries for the community's needs) to monks or, sometimes, land or materials or labour for building a new monastery or *Vihara*.⁸⁰

4. Jains and Christians in dialogue⁸¹: Seeking common ground

The Jains, both monks and nuns and the lay adherents, categorically believe in the proactive nonviolent way of life, which alone can lead one to emancipation or total annihilation of karma or, at the most, bring about a better existence in the following birth. Non-injury to life is the prime virtue of religion (*Ahimsa paramo dharma*)⁸² is the dictum; and for the Jains, *vegetarianism*⁸³ (or veganism) is the external sign of nonviolent way of life. The Jaina community projects a *nonviolent society* as their social ideal. The final human destiny, called Moksha, has a close link to the practice of *Ahimsa*.

As such, nonviolence of the Jains and the Sacrificial Love (in the form of service to humanity) of the Christians has many things in common. When Jesus was asked to indicate the greatest commandment for life-preservation, he pointed out to the age-old practice, familiar to any Jew, the Love of God and Love of Neighbour: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is *like it*, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."⁸⁴ Hence, one cannot pretend to say that one loves God if s/he does not love her/his neighbour, and such a person is a *liar*.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Anathapindika, a man of unmeasured wealth was called the supporter of orphans and the friend of the poor, offers Jetavana and Visakha, a wealthy woman, offers Pubbarama or Eastern Garden, Paul Carus: op. cit. Ch. 24 and 25

⁸¹ Vincent Sekhar SJ: "Avenues for a Jain-Christian Dialogue (Part I)," Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, Delhi, Platinum Jubilee Year, Volume 76, No.4, April 2012, pp 280-292

⁸² Ahimsa or non-injury to self and others has become the quintessence of all dharma (*Ahimsa paramo dharma*) in Jain tradition. It does not mean that they lay absolute claim over this important virtue but their vision of life and reality has naturally led them to the understanding of this prime value of life. Ahimsa is both an intellectual attitude and an ethical conduct. Ahimsa at the rational level has contributed to non-absolutist theories like *Anekantavada* and human and natural inter-relatedness though *Syadvada* in Jainism. At the best, these ideals have enhanced the pluralistic culture of India.

⁸³ While there is a wide-spread Christian and global consciousness on the vegetarian way of life, the Christian covenant with non-human life, though admirable, does not strictly exclude *meat-eating*. But there are many Christian vegetarian associations around the world. (Vincent Sekhar: "Christianity and Nonviolence," Vidyajyoti, Vol. 73, No. 8, August 2009, pp. 58-65)

⁸⁴ The Bible: The Gospel according to Matthew 22.34-40 (this is being referred to in the Old testament of the Bible: Deuteronomy 6.4-5; Leviticus 19.18 "You must love your neighbour as yourself.")

⁸⁵ The Bible: First Letter of St. John 2.4

Jesus' suffering love and death on the Cross,⁸⁶ the forgiveness he offered to his torturers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,"⁸⁷ and the promise he made to the thief, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise"⁸⁸ are the reconciling efforts he could make of the whole unjust world to God. It was his forgiving, unifying, transforming, redeeming, and reconciling love. It is this aspect of Jesus' life that drew attention of M.K. Gandhi. To him, Jesus was *Ahimsavadi* (*one who vouches nonviolence*) and *Satyagrahi* (*one who holds the Truth*). The Jains and the Christians have *love and nonviolence* in common. One could visualize this in the life of the holy ones in the Jain community, the *Tirthankaras*.⁸⁹ Their mythical biography describes their tender love and considerations shown even to ants in not harming them. Positive love and reconciliation are both a demand and a challenge given to Jain-Christian communities for personal as well as social transformation and global justice. Acts of love, charity, and reconciliation are an engaging task for the good-hearted persons in both the communities. They are the focal point and a space-provider for a meaningful Jain-Christian conversation.

Pope Benedict XVI invited Christian brothers and sisters from the different confessions and the representatives of the different religious traditions to join him in Assisi on October 27, 2011 in commemoration of 25th anniversary of the "World Day of Prayer and Peace" convoked by Pope John Paul II in 1986. The meeting was for a day of "reflection, dialogue, and prayer for peace and justice in the world." In his address the pope condemned violence in the name of religion: **"As a Christian I want to say at this point," confessed the pope, "yes it is true, in the course of history, force has also been used in the name of the Christian faith. We acknowledge it with great shame."** The pope called for reconciliation between countries toward charitable path: "It's a case of being together on a journey towards truth, a case of taking a decisive stand for human dignity and a case of common engagement for peace against every form of destructive force." The pope concluded by saying, "I would like to assure you that the Catholic Church will not let up in her fight against violence, in her commitment for peace in the world. We are animated by the common desire to be "pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ The Jains do not vouch to the idea of *vicarious suffering* or *substitutionary atonement*, like the suffering of Jesus for the sin and salvation of people (a reaffirming of prophet Isaiah 53.4-5: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." The Jains believe that one cannot substitute anybody else. One has to exhaust one's own karma. Any act of self-retribution or suffering undertaken for the sake of others can be acclaimed only in a practical sense.

⁸⁷ The Bible: The Gospel according to Luke 23.34

⁸⁸ The Bible: The Gospel according to Luke 23.43

⁸⁹ The Kalpa Sutra: Life of the Jinas (Life of Lord Rishabha, Lord Neminatha, Lord Parsvanatha, Lord Mahavira), Jaina Sutras - Part I, translated by Hermann Jacobi (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 22)

⁹⁰ See the video link (<http://gloria.tv/?media=209177>) in the website on Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (<http://www.dimmid.org/>)

Most of the Jain organizations and their network⁹¹ are engaged in sharing news and views on Jain society and religion, in preserving and propagating their faith, in announcing academic conferences, talks, spiritual and religious discourses, in helping its community (and others) in all kinds of business, matrimonial, and other transactions, and humanitarian works. There are any number of Jaina health-related agencies and hospitals for both humans and animals. There is a general impression that the Jains are a rich business community. Though rich, their personal life-style and their savings in the form of surplus money is put back in their business⁹² or donated for religious, educational, and charitable purposes. One could witness to the philanthropic attitude and engagement of the Jains in their establishment of several eye hospitals and cancer institutes, bird sanctuaries and animal hospitals almost in all big cities.⁹³ The legendary Bird Hospital at the entrance of Chandni Chawk in front of the Red Fort in Delhi is one instance.

In a similar way, the Christian churches in India, following the command of their leader and saviour Jesus Christ, have truly engaged in the service of humanity, especially to the downtrodden and the marginalized in many ways and at various levels. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*,⁹⁴ prepared by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, is an important document on the many aspects of life humanity needs to pay attention to. It is also a well-known fact that Christian educational institutions are a pride to many nations. Several institutions have taken up the challenge of giving quality education to the first generation and the drop-outs, particularly the street children, women, tribals and the dalits. The positive and proactive love shown to the poor by the Church leaders and the Christian community remains a true witness to God's love in this world. Such paramount love can be shown in multiple ways in dialogue with other religious believers, especially the

⁹¹ Vide websites on Jainism: <http://www.jaindharmonline.com/more/jweb.htm> (especially on Jain world, Jain net, Jain samaj, Jinvani, Jain spirit, Jain dharm, Jain heritage, Religious India, Jaina.org, Jain mandir, Jain granth, Jain magazines, Jain community, Digambara Jain, Jain Oswals, Jain news, Jainology, Jain sadhvi, Young Jains, Jain acharya, Jain story, Jain people)

⁹² There is a general impression that the Jains, being a business community, have an objective of accumulating wealth by any means. There are several ideas and values in Jaina ethics to show that they are consistent with the spirit of capitalism. (Arvind K. Agarwal's 'Jaina Ethics and Spirit of Capitalism - A Critical Reappraisal of Weber' in N. K. Singhi: (ed.) *Ideal, Ideology and Practice* (Studies in Jainism), Printwell Publishers, Jaipur, 1987, p. 199-202; also see another article in the same book 'Jainism and its perversion in actual practice' by Tarachand Gangwal, p. 124-136) Joharimal Parekh says that Jainism does not believe in materialism and consequently 'human behaviour towards wealth' has been heavily discounted. He has subscribed to this view in his article 'Jain Economic Thought'. See *Jain Journal*, Jain Bhavan Publication, Calcutta, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, January 1995

⁹³ The Bird Hospital was founded in 1956 and it has a capacity to lodge over 10,000 birds, with separate wards for different kinds of birds that are diseased, injured by accidents, and with malnutrition. It is entirely funded by donation. (Ref: <http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/world/bird-hospital.html#cr>)

⁹⁴ The document speaks about the God's plan of salvation, the dignity of human person and the significance of human rights, the fundamental values of family and social life, the dignity of work and work culture, Political and democratic systems, safeguarding the environment, promotion of peace and justice, and commitment to a civilization of love. The long analytical index of references is a handy help in locating the foregoing areas of concern. (Pauline Publications, Mumbai, 2004)

Jains, whose religious and social principles, sentiments, and engagement vibrate with those of the Christians. After all, any religion worthy of its name is to offer salvation to humanity. If not, it would not be true to its identity.⁹⁵

Hence, the two communities, not excluding others (as the ideal of love and nonviolence is common to Indian religions), could work out possible ways of witnessing to their faith in collaborative efforts (dialogue of action⁹⁶), by undertaking joint projects to uplift the poor and the needy and to work for justice and human rights protection in India as well as in the globe. Such collaboration might, in the course of witnessing to love, lead to a *deep dialogue* of sharing and celebrating together the joy of being God's children on earth.

5. Religions are resourceful and we need to drink from their springs:

Religions of India praise the upholding and practice of nonviolence in various forms as the prime virtue in life. Religions call for a careful scrutiny of those sayings, including scriptures, to judge the righteousness of dharma that holds people, nations, and life together. For example, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (*Judaism and Christianity: Bible, Leviticus 19.18*) One should be kind to others, seeing in the other one's own self. Religions also appeal to groups and nations pointing out to the nature and the unfolding of anger, hatred, and revenge that are powerful weapons that destroy the world. It is self-discipline, goodwill, and the attitude of tolerance that would sustain the injurious world. And hence power cannot be invested on the ones who are mindless of self-control and good judgement. On the other, it is forgiveness and reconciliation that keep the world and the hearts together.

Following are some of the key passages on *Nonviolence to Life* drawn from various religious scriptures:⁹⁷

Ahimsa is the highest dharma; ahimsa is the highest form of self-control;
 Ahimsa is the highest offering; ahimsa is the highest austerity.
 Ahimsa is the highest Yajna; Ahimsa is the best fruition;
 Ahimsa is the best friend; and Ahimsa is the greatest happiness.
 Not all the sacrificial rituals, nor all the giving as charity,
 Nor all the bathing in the holy waters together, will be equal to not-violence.
 (*Hinduism: The Mahabharata, Anushasana-parva 116.28-30, Badrinath C: 2007*)

⁹⁵ Vincent Sekhar: Practice of Interreligious Dialogue, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2006, p. 35

⁹⁶ The Catholic Church document "Dialogue and Mission" (1984) talks about the four forms of dialogue: The Dialogue of Life, The Dialogue of Works or Action, The Dialogue of Experts or Religious Exchange, and The Dialogue of Religious experience. (Vincent Sekhar: Practice of Interreligious Dialogue, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2006, pp. 71-72)

⁹⁷ Vincent Sekhar SJ: Let us Stand up for Prayer – Sacred Texts that Shape Perspectives, Claretian Publications, Bangalore, 2016 pp. 87-98

Only those will approve of violence that are disordered, are fools, are men of no faith, are doubtful about the self, and are not highly regarded either. Manu has propagated only ahimsa in all human acts. It is some humans who kill animals as a sacrificial offering in a Yajna. It is proper therefore that one carefully examines the authority on which dharma is based. For in all dharmas for all living beings, ahimsa is regarded as the very first of all.

(Hinduism: The Mahabharata, Shanti-parva 265.4-6)

Nothing one loves in this world more than one's life. Therefore desiring kindness to oneself, one should be kind to others.

One should be kind to others, seeing in the other one's own self, for nothing on this earth is dearer than one's life.

To every living being, death is a disaster; at the time of death all living beings shake fearfully.

(Hinduism: The Mahabharata, Anushasana-parva 116.8, 22, 17)

Hatred and the spirit of revenge are the weapons that destroy the world.

The power of physical weapons is increased beyond description by the power of anger and hatred and revenge breathed into them. Even a piece of straw becomes a weapon of the greatest force when touched with great hatred and the greater resolve to revenge. Once fired, the weapons of hatred and revenge cannot be withdrawn – except by those who have the greater power of self-control, forgiveness and reconciliation. Therefore, the physical weapons of most destructive power shall never be in the hands of those with no control over their mind and over their judgement even less. No matter how great the danger to you, never use the weapon of ultimate force, especially never over human lives.

(Hinduism: The Mahabharata, Saaptika-parva 12.8)

[Yudhisthira to Draupadi] Draupadi, if your appeal to anger and force were accepted as just principles of conduct, what kind of world would this be? There would never be peace among men, for anger is the root of all conflicts... It is forgiveness that keeps the world together. The opposite of forgiveness is anger and intolerance. And anger uncontrolled, destroys men. It brings destruction all around because a man in anger does not know what should be said and what should not be said. To him, there is then nothing that must not be done, nor anything that must not be said. Driven by anger, a man can commit any offence, can kill the respected elders, by his offensive speech, insult men who are noble, or can even kill himself. That is because he is not able to see a thing in its proper light and is unable to see the limits.

(Hinduism: The Mahabharata, Vana-parva 29.1, 3-5, 6-9, 21-22)

He who commits murder must be considered as the worst offender, more wicked than a defamer, than a thief, and then he who injures with a staff.

(Hinduism: The Laws of Manu 8.345, Buhler, Georg (trans.): 2009)

He who takes his own or another's life becomes an outcaste.

(Hinduism: Apastamba Dharma Sutra 1.10.28.17, Buhler, Georg (trans.): 2006)

Without doing injury to living beings, meat cannot be had anywhere; and the killing of living beings is not conducive to heaven; hence eating of meat should be avoided. (*Hinduism, Laws of Manu 5.48, Morgan: 1996*)

One should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture, or kill any animal, living being, organism, or sentient being. This doctrine of nonviolence is immaculate, immutable, and eternal. Just as suffering is painful to you, in the same way it is painful, disquieting, and terrifying to all animals, living beings, organisms, and sentient beings.

(*Jainism: Acarangasutra 4.25-26, Muni Mahendra Kumar: 1981*)

This is the quintessence of wisdom: not to kill anything. Know this to be the legitimate conclusion from the principle of reciprocity with regard to non-killing. He should cease to injure living beings whether they move or not, on high, below, and on earth. For this has been called the Nirvana, which consists in peace... A true monk should not accept such food and drink as has been especially prepared for him involving the slaughter of living beings. He should not partake of a meal which contains but a particle of forbidden food: this is the Law of him who is rich in control.

Whatever he suspects, he may not eat. A man who guards his soul and subdues his senses, should never assent to anybody killing living beings.

(*Jainism, Sutratkanga 1.11.10-16, Jacobi: 2003*)

One who you think should be hit is none else but you. One who you think should be governed is none else but you. One who you think should be tortured is none else but you. One who you think should be enslaved is none else but you. One who you think should be killed is none else but you. A sage is ingenuous and leads his life after comprehending the parity of the killed and the killer. Therefore, neither does he cause violence to others nor does he make others do so.

(*Jainism, Acarangasutra 5.101-2, Muni Mahendra Kumar: 1981*)

Suffering is the offspring of violence--realize this and be ever vigilant.

(*Jainism, Acarangasutra 3.13*)

All tremble at the rod. All fear death.

Comparing others with oneself, one should neither strike nor cause to strike.

All tremble at the rod. Life is dear to all.

Comparing others with oneself, one should neither strike nor cause to strike.

Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms with the rod other pleasure-loving beings, experiences no happiness hereafter.

Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms not with the rod other pleasure-loving beings, experiences happiness hereafter.

(*Buddhism: Dhammapada 129-32, Narada Maha Thera: 1972*)

Victory begets enmity; the defeated dwell in pain. Happily the peaceful live, discarding both victory and defeat.

(Buddhism: Dhammapada 201, Acharya Buddharakkhita: 1986)

If one is trying to practice meditation and is still eating meat, he would be like a man closing his ears and shouting loudly and then asserting that he heard nothing... How can a bhikshu, who hopes to become a deliverer of others, himself be living on the flesh of other sentient beings? Pure and earnest bhikshus will never wear clothing made of silk, nor wear boots made of leather for it involves the taking of life. Neither will they indulge in eating milk or cheese because thereby they are depriving the young animals of that which is rightfully belongs to them.

(Buddhism: Surangama Sutra, Goddard, Dwight (ed.): 1994)

Brethren, if outsiders should speak against me, or against the Doctrine, or against the Order, you should not on that account either bear malice, or suffer resentment, or feel ill will. If you, on that account, should feel angry and hurt, that would stand in the way of your own self- conquest.

(Buddhism: Digha Nikaya i.3, Brahmajala Sutta, Rhys Davids: 2011)

If an evil man, on hearing of what is good, comes and creates a disturbance, you should hold your peace. You must not angrily upbraid him; then he who has come to curse you will merely harm himself.

(Buddhism: Sutra of Forty-two Sections 7, Chu Ch'an (trans.): 1947)

Those who beat you with fists,
Do not pay them in the same coin,
But go to their house and kiss their feet.

(Sikhism: Adi Granth, Kohli, Surindar Singh: 1961)

You shall not kill.

(Judaism and Christianity: The Holy Bible, RSV edition, Exodus 20.13)

Then they came up and laid hands upon Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

(Christianity: The Holy Bible, RSV edition, Matthew 26.51-52)

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil.

But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;

and if anyone would sue you and take your coat,

let him have your cloak as well;

and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

(Christianity: The Holy Bible, RSV edition, Matthew 5.38-41)

Conclusion:

As contemporary India is going through a slow process of development and growth, the land and its people encounter different forms of violence in different spheres of life: cultural and religious fundamentalism, inequality and social dominance and subjugation by and between ethnic and linguistic groups, economic imbalance and unequal distribution of wealth, environmental degradation and so on. While different social and political forces are at work to redeem a situation such as this, religious and spiritual resources offer permanent solutions to the contemporary evils in society.

Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism propose *non-injury to life* and *detachment from material good*, etc. as the only remedy for changing the world of violence and greed. The simple lifestyle and the generous attitude prompted by the sages and spiritual masters of these religions are sure steps to meet the challenges of the contemporary world of consumerism and hoarding mentality. Much of suffering and grief is the result of indiscriminate violence. It is violence done to life out of greed and other passions, the prime causes of conflicts among individuals and human communities. Even more harm is done to life by means of ignorance.

Violence becomes glaring as living beings are categorized as high and low, and some are treated as *lesser* beings. Absolutism and trends that support unhealthy individualism result in the use of violence in thoughts, words and deeds. Jain and Buddhist attitude to life and environment prompts a *righteous (dharmic)* way of life, promising to preserve and to promote life in its dignity and freedom. Ideas, ideals, and values, supported by religion can lead the nations to cross over sorrow and pain, both in contemporary India and elsewhere, if only its *silent whispers* are heard loudly!

Commentary

Eli Sasaran McCarthy

In Hinduism, violence is also described as un-truth or that which obstructs the truth of reality.[1] Hence, Gandhi drawing on Hinduism identifies his nonviolent movement toward God as “Satyagraha,” i.e. clinging to truth. Key aspects of this truth include the ultimate unity of all being and human equality, and thus, for Gandhi nonviolence is a virtue that enables us to realize such truth.[2] Each of us perceives truth partially, and thus, Gandhi argues that no violence is permitted to impose one’s partial sense of the truth as if it were the complete truth.[3] Humans lack the capacity to know the absolute truth, and even if we could, Gandhi says persons cannot be coerced to truth.[4]

In turn, it seems Gandhi and others would likely challenge Sekhar’s notion that violence “can set the process of transformation in motion.” (p.10) Gandhi was very clear that the means are the seeds to, i.e. determine, the ends. Thus, acts of violence could not set “in motion,” grow into, or bring about the ends of sustainable peace or social justice, even when violent force appears to ‘work’ in the immediate moment or short-term. Some form of bitterness, de-humanization, trauma, habits or cycles of violence ensue. Further, Gandhi would also clarify that it is passivity rather than “absolute nonviolence,” which is not justified. As Gandhi’s own thought was developing and maturing,[5] he had at times acknowledged that violent force would be better than cowardice, even though he continued to call us to the way of nonviolence and clearly called any violence unlawful.[6] Gandhi said:

“But the Light within me is steady and clear. There is no escape for any of us save through truth and nonviolence. I know that war is wrong, is an unmitigated evil. I know too that it has got to go. I firmly believe that freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom. Would that all the acts alleged against me were found to be wholly indefensible rather than that by any act of mine nonviolence was held to be compromised or that I was ever thought to be in favor of violence or un-truth in any shape or form.”[7]

[1] Michael Nagler, “Hope or Terror: Gandhi and the Other 9/11,” 2008, <http://mettacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/hot.pdf>.

[2] Nicholas Gier, *The Virtue of Nonviolence from Gautama to Gandhi*. New York: State University NY Press, 2004, 148.

Nonviolence for Gandhi was both positive love and prevention of harm.

[3] Terrence Rynne, *Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008, 48.

[4] Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 19, March 23, 1921; *Essential Writings*, 87. Gier, *The Virtue of Nonviolence*, 148.

[5] The first quote in Sekhar’s footnote 48 on Gandhi is from *Young India* and is relatively early on in his reflections on nonviolence and these seem to change later on. The statement about Gandhi from Sharma is the latter’s interpretation and should more accurately say “if *passivity* would cause the sacrifice...” The comments attributed to Gandhi from Bose mis-represent that nonviolent resistance does not depend on the conversion of the adversary but can succeed by diminishing the pillars of support enabling the adversary.

[6] “Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defence or for the defence of the defenceless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission,” in *The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi*, “Cowardice and Violence,”

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/phil8.htm>.

[7] *The Mind Of Mahatma Gandhi*, “Gandhi’s Wars,” <https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/gandhis-wars.html>. For a brief introduction to Gandhi’s approach see Michael Nagler, “Hope or Terror: Gandhi and the Other 9/11,” 2008,

<http://mettacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/hot.pdf>.