



“BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON AHIMSA”: A CASE EXTENDING PHYSICAL HARM THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Buddha’s teachings are a source of ahimsa or non-violence. When people feel that they have refrained from taking life forms, then they have attained ahimsa, according to the first precept of Buddhism. As speech and mind are also important, therefore, ahimsa extends beyond physical non-violence. Perceptions and views on ahimsa initiates from independent existence of beings and the beliefs on this existence. Practical expressions of compassion and kindness are different in religions, which is excavated through comparative and cross-cultural studies. Dialectic analysis is done by considering Palli and Sanskrit texts. Comparative and dialectic analysis is beneficial for evaluating the perceptions and views existing within the religions. These comparisons are effective for detecting the key points on ahimsa.

Keywords: Buddhism, Ahimsa, perceptions, methodology, review, literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Buddhist perspectives of ahimsā (non-harm or non-violence) originates from the core teachings of Buddha. These perceptions vary from person to person. Some believe in ahimsa, while some others do not believe (Tiwary & Sharma, 2024). Deep investigations reveal that the term *ahimsā* is commonly associated with religious sentiments of Jainism and Hinduism. According to these religions, the principle of non-harm is ethical and moral.

1.1 First Precept of Buddhism

Buddhist first of the Five Precepts is “Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi”. This, when translated into English, means, individual proclamation to *undertake the precept of refraining from the act of taking any form of life*. From this generates the feeling of non-harm to living beings, which is the foundational ethics, as per Buddhist moral discipline (Kower, 2024).

1.2 Extensions beyond Physical Non-Violence

In Buddhism, ahimsā includes three aspects demarcating actions. These are body, speech and mind. Body deals with avoiding killing or causing physical harm to self or others. Speech looks into the fact that harsh, abusive, or divisive speech is avoided for making the relationships hostile with others. Mind works towards reducing ill-will, anger, and cruelty for others. Thus, non-violence extends to just refraining from physical aggression and stretches towards cultivating a mind of compassion (*karuṇā*) and kindness (*mettā*) (Bajracharya, 2024). The goal is to uproot the intentions and thoughts of causing harm.

1.3. Relation between Ahimsā and Interdependence

Buddhism directs people to be dependent on the source or origin (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). According to these beliefs, all beings arise and exist interdependently. From this perspective, harming another ultimately indicates harming oneself (Jerryson, 2018). Therefore, compassionate mind is naturally inclined toward not causing harm to anyone, not self nor others.

1.4. Expressive practical expressions of compassion

According to Buddhist philosophy, forms of non-violence is active. This is not merely “doing nothing but includes showing kindness to others. For example, rescuing animals from harmful objects, refraining from conflicts, looking for peaceful negotiations to promote social harmony (Jerryson, 2018). For achieving these, cultivating *mettā* meditation is one of the

means, rather a positive ahimsa force, indicating not just avoidance.

1.5 Relationship between ahimsa and Karma

Harmful actions compel people to face dire consequences, deviating them from their goals. These consequences create unwholesome karma, which are rooted in the avarices like greed, hatred, and delusion (Tripathi, 2025). Acts of non-harm is fruitful for generating puñña (merit), which supports the path to liberation.

1.6. Exceptions and Nuance of Buddhism and ahimsa

Buddhism generally discourages violence. This is applicable for all forms; however, complexity is acknowledged. This is evident from intent matters, which greatly determines intensity of the karma. Some Mahāyāna texts have highlighted exceptional cases (e.g., a Bodhisattva preventing greater harm), but there are limitations, as these have been framed as extremely rare, which requires pure compassion. Even retaliation or self-righteous violence is condemned, which might be supported by other religions (Fan, 2025). Therefore, it could be assumed that ahimsā is ideal, but wisdom (prajñā) guides its application and implementation according to moral and ethical standards.

1.7. Ultimate path to Ahimsā

When people feel that they have become a separate being, they have reached the highest point of non-violence. This is a true feeling, which is sometimes considered as an illusion, dissolving consciousness on selves. In this stage, anger and hatred gets extinguished, making compassion spontaneous (Kontala, 2024). Overall, it is the natural state, where mind is awakened on the issues taking place in the surroundings.

Based on these facts, it can be stated that in Buddhist terminology, ahimsā is the act of non-harming performed through body, speech, and mind. Thoughts of non-harming comes from compassion and wisdom. These thoughts come from the aim to do well-being of all beings, and is extended to all forms of life. Perceptions are morality, which develops ahimsa as a disciplinary path to liberation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section deals with scholarly and contemporary views on non-violence / ahimsā in Buddhism. These views cover foundations, complexity, applications, and tensions around the evaluation of acts to judge whether they are morally and ethically right.

2.1. Scriptural representation of Compassion, Non-Harming, and Ethical Precepts

As per the arguments of Tiwary and Sharma, (2024), principle of non-harming (ahimsā) originates from ethical frameworks used in Buddhism. Buddhist non-violence concept is based on the first of the Five Precepts, which prohibits killing. In this precept, non-violence extends beyond physical acts of compassionate attitudes toward all beings. In this context, mention can be made of texts of the Pāli Canon (e.g. Dhammapada, Sutta Pitaka) which are often cited in modern studies. Focus of these studies is on empathy, compassion, and interconnectedness. For example, all beings fear danger of death. From this, practitioners take the lesson and encouragement to develop self before advising others. Therefore, practice before preaching is affirmed here. From this point, it is thus established that non-violence for Buddhists involves bodily actions, speech, and mental states showing the attributes and emotions of love, compassion, kindness.

2.2 Personal Ethics in societal application for ahimsa

Recent works on Buddhist non-violence is something more than just a personal virtue. These works inform conflict resolutions, which are to be conducted at communal, national, and global levels. Reference can be cited to an article by Tiwary & Sharma, which was published for tracing the application of Buddhist teachings on compassion, interconnectedness, mindfulness, along with real-world conflicts, and cases on Ashoka, and modern contexts revealing role of Buddhist clergies during the Vietnam War, or peaceful struggles initiated by the great Dalai Lama. Another recent paper by Kower, (2024) stressed how non-violence (ahimsā) comes under Buddhism, contributing to societal harmony, personal moral growth, and collective wellbeing.

2.3. Tensions, deviations, and critical challenges on ahimsa

Scholars like Bajracharya, (2024) noted historical and contemporary deviations which has been noted from the ideal existence of non-violence, prevalent in the communities. These communities have been identified as Buddhist. According to the study, despite teaching advocacies, non-violence toward all life (including animals), in some Buddhist cases, continue to engage in practices, which are unethical. For example, animal sacrifice, meat-eating, which are unethical according to core Buddhist ethics. Jerryson, M. (2018) argued about strictness in non-violence in terms of interpretation. This is especially applicable in contexts of war, self-defense, and political conflict, which are matters of academic debate. The chapter “Buddhism, War, and Violence” in the anthology on Buddhist ethics is important

for exploring historical resentment of violence by Buddhists in times of dilemmas on tensions between doctrine and lived realities. Along with this, there are Buddhist Ahimsā and its Existential Aporias, which argues about injunctions against killing. These injunctions can clash with the moral challenges borne by real-world violence. These challenges are harmful for a Buddhist practitioner, especially in situations where non-resistance causes further harm (e.g. in war or genocide).

2.4. Comparative and Inter-Tradition Analyses

A comparative study has been conducted by Jongwong, (2018), between Jain and Buddhist approaches. These approaches examine the perceptions on non-violence (ahimsā) in Jainism. These perceptions are further analyzed as absolute non-violence towards even in the tiniest life forms. Deep investigations demarcate the difference which lies between the Buddhist and Jainist views on non-violence. These views are centralized on compassion and intention to increase benefits for others, rather than an all-encompassing prohibition. Tripathi, A. (2025), compares Buddhist and Gandhian conceptions of non-violence. These conceptions explore the unexplored realms on Buddhist ahimsā functions. Here, the lens is ethical-spiritual, which is ideal for describing Gandhian non-violence. This description became a social transformative and political force, to ensure maximum wellbeing of others.

2.5 Synthesis of basic aspects on ahimsa

Based on reviewed literature, it is a strength that Buddhist conception of non-violence is flexible but deeply moral. These conceptions stresses on intention, compassion, and respect for life. These aspects induce flexibility among people to choose acts which are ethically and morally correct. This flexibility enables non-violence both as inner cultivation and social ethics. Here, one of the elements is ambiguity, which is seen in real-world situations. Long, (2024) cites evidence, which lies in war, self-defense, and social conflicts, which is a challenge for ideal notions, which exists for non-harming. Historical cases of Buddhist-inspired violence or involvement in conflict (or their ethical justification) highlight the gap between doctrine and practice.

Another element is the ethical depth, which highlights Buddhist non-violence comprising not just about abstention, but also about empathy, transformation of sufferings to joy, and addressing root causes of conflict (e.g. ignorance, hatred, greed). Here, comparative nuance is also important for comparing Buddhist views with that of other Indian traditions (e.g. Jainism)

or modern interpretations (e.g. Gandhian non-violence). According to Bawa, (2024), Buddhist ahimsā reveals overlaps and distinctive emphases on the roles of intention, karma, and liberative goals as compared to purely moral absolutism.

2.6 Recent Contributions and Gaps

Recent contributions of Tiwary & Sharma (2024) on Buddhist views of ahimsa reflect linkages done between Buddhist non-violence to conflict resolution in contemporary settings. Kower, (2024) sheds light on the relevance of Buddhist non-violence to modern social harmony, environmental ethics, and community welfare. Jongwong, (2018) attempted comparison between works on Buddhist ahimsā and Jain and Gandhian non-violence. Gaps are detected as there is lacking of precise scope to describe non-violence in terms of absolute or conditional end to sufferings. Scholarly debates are consistent for practice and the doctrine established. Many Buddhists historically refrain from following vegetarianism or supporting violence under exceptional circumstances. As per the arguments of Bajracharya, (2024), it raises interrogative parameter on authentic adaptation of ahimsā among real social constructs. Institutional vs individual tensions also exist between ideal notions on ahimsā, political, communal realities (state, war, social justice) which remains underexplored in many studies.

2.7 Overall assessments on Literature Review

Overall, scholarly reviews on Buddhist ahimsā emerges as a morally robust, flexible, and deeply ethical principle, guiding one to transcend from simple “non-violence” towards actions that embed compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness. Reviews also reveal real-world applications of ahimsā as complicated in the domains of historical, social, and political forces, challenge the ideal notions. Researchers or practitioners can benefit from this, as Ahimsā is best understood not as a harsh restriction, but as a dynamic ethics which is to be followed for consistent reflections on contextual wisdom, and compassionate intention.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts cross cultural comparative study for studying Buddhist views on ahimsa and that of others, which lies in dialectic and linguistic analysis. Qualitative and interpretive approach works well for interpreting maximized good for the people through ahimsa. Hermeneutic method is adopted for interpreting Palli and Sanskrit texts along with Buddhists, for expanding the scope and arena of study. Library and textual research are conducted for referring to sources which consist information related to the research topic. Data for the study

is collected from primary sources like canonical Buddhist scriptures. Secondary sources like books, journals, reports on Buddhist ethics, philosophy of religion, bioethics are roped in for retrieving necessary information.

4. CONCLUSION

Buddhist perceptions on ahimsa is directed towards ethics, which direct people to aim for good actions. These actions are to be based on maximizing benefits for the people, reducing thoughts on causing harm to self or others. After performing the acts, if one feels that they have changed, then it could be morally ethical or unethical. This is because of the compassion, which others have shown, and there is a compulsion to reciprocate through kindness. However, if thoughts of causing harm comes in reciprocation, then thoughts are violent and needs to change for the social welfare. Comparative studies help in exploring religious views on ahimsa. This exploration expands the scope and arena of study, aligning moral and ethical standards. This alignment affirms dialectic and linguistic analysis for evaluating the perceptions surrounding non-violence. It is a problem that all religious views are not the same for all persons. Some persons believe in peaceful coexistence while others do not. They believe that if one has fired, reciprocation is also to be backfire.

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