

LESSON 06

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF AHIMSA

The doctrine of Ahimsa was not confined to its negative aspect namely just avoidance of injury only but at the same time great stress was laid to emphasize the positive aspect namely increasing the welfare of others. Householders are encouraged to the grant of charities, to extend support to the organization that carry welfare activities and strongly advocated the spirit of tolerance with reference to the other religionists. As a result in Jainism the doctrine of Ahimsa means universal love.

Therefore householders are supposed:

- 1) To follow the practice of giving charity,
- 2) To organize the welfare activities not only for humans but also for animals, birds, etc.,
- 3) To cultivate the spirit of toleration towards the followers of other faiths or religions.

Encouragement to Grant of Charities:

Jains householders should make it a point to give regularly from their income charities. A charity is recommended because in giving one's belongings to others one exercises control over his greed which is nothing but a form of Hinsa. That is why in the interest of the cultivation of Ahimsa sacred Jaina text of "Purusharthasiddhi-upaya" describes "In making a gift one gets over greed, which is a form of Hinsa, and hence gifts made to worthy recipients amount to a renunciation of Hinsa that amounts to observance of Ahimsa".

To raise the purity involved in giving charity it is laid down that the donor must have following seven qualities:

- 1) The donor must not expect any gain or reward in exchange of charity
- 2) The donor should be tolerant and give it calmly without any anger or frustration
- 3) The donor must possess feelings of happiness and have joyous appearance at the time of giving gifts.
- 4) The donor must act in all sincerity and should give without deceit.
- 5) The donor should have no feelings of jealousy or envy.
- 6) The donor should not have any feelings of sorrow or repentance.
- 7) The donor should not have any sense of pride in giving.

To maintain the sanctity of charity it has been to donor it should be given to given only to proper persons. The person to who receives the charity is termed as Patra and for the purposes of charity they are classified into three categories, namely

- 1) Supatras, good recipients (those who are having right belief and engrossed in practicing religious vows),
- 2) Kapatras, not so good recipients (those who are with proper external conduct but without real right belief), and
- 3) Apatras, unworthy recipients (those who are neither having proper external conduct nor real right belief)

Obviously, giving charity to the Supatras is highly recommended while giving to Kupatras is not encouraged but giving to the Apatras is definitely forbidden.

Charity given to supatras even though it may be a little bears more merits than giving more charity to others.

Support to Welfare Activities

Jainism also encourages the charity made out of compassion to any one who is hungry, thirsty, diseased, distressed, disabled, helpless, etc. This kind of charity has wider scope. In fact, it is not restricted to Jains alone but it is extended to all humans and even to sub-human beings which are in need of it. Such charity is considered in following four kinds:

Charity of food (Ahara-Dana)

Charity of medicines (Aushadh-Dana),

Charity of shelter, protection from danger, attack, intimidation, or threat (Abhaya-Dana) and

Charity of books, imparting of knowledge (Shastra-Dana or Vidya-Dana)

In this connection it is pertinent to note that as a part of the implementation of the vow of Ahimsa and including the vow of Aparigraha, the Jaina householders for several centuries have made it one of their cardinal principles to give these four gifts to all persons who are in need of such help. In fact, this help has been extended to the protection and well-being of insects, birds and animals also. For this the Jains have established alm-houses, rest-houses, dispensaries and educational institutions.

Along with the dispensaries for humans, the Jains have been conducting special institutions known as Panjarapols for the protection and care of helpless and decrepit animals and birds. In unusual times of flood and famine these Panjarapols have been carrying out various activities for animal protection. There is hardly any town or village of Gujarat or Rajasthan, where Panjarapols is not present in some form or other.

Insistence on the Spirit of Toleration

Another positive aspect of Ahimsa is adopting the spirit of tolerance in addition to the encouragement to grant the charities and the support to the welfare organizations. Show tolerance to others physical activities, verbal words and even in mental thoughts. In other words, the attitude of tolerance at intellectual, religious and other fields assumes great importance. This attitude of tolerance has been expressed in Jaina scriptures through the doctrine of Anekantvad, i.e., many-sidedness, which states that a thing can be considered from many points of view. At any given time we can only think of subjects in some views but not all. So no one with surety can say I know is the only truth unless you have Kevaljnan and then all aspects are known. This obviously broadens the outlook of the persons as they look at a thing from different angles. At the same time the principle of Anekantvad does not create the feelings of enmity or hatred towards the other religionists because it believes that other religions also would be having some truths from their points of view. Hence by articulating the principle of Anekantvad, the Jaina scriptures have strongly advocated the principle of tolerance amongst intellectual, religious, social and other fields.

In this connection it can be maintained that toleration is the characteristic of Jaina ideology because Jainism has always held that it is wrong, if not dangerous, to presume that one's own creed alone represents the Truth. As a consequence the Jaina scriptures have always advised the Jains of all ranks not to harbor any feelings of enmity and hatred towards the followers of other religions but on the contrary to have a spirit of toleration and cooperation with reference to the members of other religions and even denominations. Even the Jaina Monarchs and Generals of the Armed Forces have a clean and commendable record to their credit in this regard.