

# TREATMENT OF NON-VIOLENCE IN THE SANTI PARVAN OF THE MAHABHARATA

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## ABSTRACT:

The Mahabharata is the name of that epic that has influenced the people of all over the world throughout the ages. It is not only a poetic production in nature. It is also considered as a whole literature in itself. The main theme of the Epic is the description of the war between the Pandavas, the son of Pandu and the Kauravas, the son of Dhritarastra. The war was fought for 18 days. The Kauravas were totally annihilated by the Pandavas and after that Yudhishthira, the eldest among the Pandavas became the king of Hastinapura. This much forms the plot of this epic but whenever we will go to the text we will find that this is a war that took place not only between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It shows good over bad, righteousness over non-righteousness, violence over non-violence. In the present paper a study will be undertaken to focus light on the concept of *ahimsa* meaning non-violence as we find in the text of the Mahabharata with particular reference to the Santi Parvan where there is profuse delineation on the current context.

**KEYWORDS:** Ahimsa, Mahabharata, non-violence, Dharma, atonement

**Methodology:** This paper is primarily based on the main text of the Santi Parvan of the Mahabharata. Verses of the text have been gone through to interpret the concept of non-violence as prescribed therein. Together with the main text secondary sources of material are also taken from the printed books, e-book etc.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Mahabharata is one of the ancient and best epics the world has ever produced. It was composed by Maharishi Vyasadeva. It comprises 18 chapters. The Santi Parvan, the chapter in hand, is the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter amongst them. There are again three sub-books and 365 sub-chapters. The Santi Parvan is the longest book among all the chapters of the Mahabharata. When the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas was over Yudhishthira took the lessons of Dharma and good administration by Bhishma who was about to his heavenly abode. Together with so many aspects the Santi Parvan exclusively deals with non-violence. The Indian terminology of the non-violence is *ahimsa*.

Ahimsa is one of the cardinal principles of human life. The concept of ahimsa is multi-faceted inspired by the premise that each living being is the incarnation of divine origin. Therefore, we should not harm anyone else. The principle of non-violence is always been eulogized by the seers of India right from the dawn of civilization. Ahimsa's core concept is to cause no injury through one's thoughts, deeds and actions.

The Mahabharata in many places discusses at length the concept of ahimsa. The great saying '*ahimsa paramo dharma*'<sup>1</sup> meaning non-violence is the highest virtue is the key concept of the epic. Ahimsa is considered to be the highest Dharma, highest norm of self control, greatest gift, best practice, best sacrifice, highest strength, best friend, ultimate happiness, greatest truth and best of all teachings.

As a matter of fact, war which is the most dangerous threat to non-violence is always instructed to be avoided. Application of force should always be the least option. And if war is still felt to be necessary the cause or purpose must be virtuous. Its sole objective is to restrain the wicked through lawful method aiming at sustaining peace. Therefore, the Mahabharata, on one side propagates ahimsa to be the culmination of one's life and on the other hand, it instructs that it is not detrimental to permit violence against the wicked people. To quote M.K. Gandhi:

"It is well-known that I have never look upon the Mahabharata as a mere record of earthly warfare. In the garb of epics, the poet has described the eternal warfare within the individual as well as the society, between truth and untruth, violence and non-violence, right and wrong. Looking at the epic even superficially one can understand how the great Vyasa has demonstrated that in this war the victor was no better off than vanquished. Out of the concourse of the warriors only seven remained to tell the tale...The author has shown clearly to that in armed warfare the contending parties are certain to stoop to meanness and trickery."<sup>2</sup>

## II. ELEMENTS OF AHIMSA IN THE SANTI PARVAN

This chapter begins with the conversation between the divine sage Narada and Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira gained victory in the war Kurukshetra. The Kauravas got proper answers to their ill motives and unjust activities towards the Pandavas. Even after the victory Yudhishthira could not make himself happy. He sat down in the bank of the river Bhagirathi and became overwhelmed with grief. Replying to Narada's enquiry whether he was in any kind of sadness even after winning the vast kingdom and prosperity. Yudhishthira said that he killed his brothers, good friends and relatives. Further, death of Abhimanyu, brothers of Draupadi brought utter grief to him. These expressions show the virtuous outlook of Yudhishthira towards life.

Narada reveals that Kauravas had rivalry towards the Pandavas right from their childhood. Afterwards, they made friendship with Karna and started showing their ill motive. Karna, on his part, wanted to learn the knowledge of archery. He approached Drona. Drona negated him to impart the knowledge to him as he belonged to an inferior caste. Karna then left to Parashurama where he concealed his identity and told him as belonging to the Brahmin caste hailing from the lineage Bhrgu. Parashurama being satisfied with him took him as his disciple. One day, Karna was moving around the hermitage of Parashurama. He saw a cow belonging to a Brahmana. He mistook it to be a wild animal and he killed it. He soon could understand his fault, went forward and apologized the Brahmana. But the Brahmana cursed him saying that he would one day come under the wheel of the chariot and he will be killed by the person against whom he always wanted victory. This is an example to show that in those days killing of cows was ardently considered to be a sinful act.

Later on, Karna had to express his real identity in front of Parashurama. He confessed that out of greed of the *brahmastra* he took the shelter of falsehood. But falsehood can never be a way to solution. Therefore, Parashurama became angry and cursed Karna that he would be unable to remember the knowledge of the *brahmastra* in due time. Falsehood cannot continue forever as a result of which there is no other way out than to face sufferings. Therefore, there is no reason to be sad on the part of Yudhishthira for killing of the Kauravas along with Karna. All these delineations by Narada could not console Yudhishthira. He said that instead of rivalry truthful speech, non-violence, absence of jealousy, attachment, forbearance, control over the mind and organs, piety of both internal and external organs are the only activities that are to be performed in one's life.<sup>3</sup> One should never become violent towards others' properties.

In the 16th chapter of the Santi Parvan Yudhishthira asked Bhishma to reveal the reason of a person's support in violent activities. Bhishma replied pointing out hunger to be the root cause of being violent. So, a person is to first win over hunger to win over the whole world. Devasthana, the great sage advised Yudhishthira to perform sacrifice as it brings peace and happiness of mind. Devasthana refers to the sayings of Svayambhuva Manu where the best qualities and desired norms of life are well expressed. Absence of violence to anyone, speaking truth, distributing adequate portion to every creature, keeping generosity to all, control over mind and the organs, giving birth of children through one's own wife only are some of the best norms of life.

Vyasadeva narrated the story of Hayagriva and thereby insisted Yudhishthira to carry on the duties of the king in the most acceptable path. He suggested Yudhishthira to protect his subject giving proportionate due to everyone. It is frequently seen amongst the general people that they kill others out of their own motives and later on they are also killed by others. These are the different segments of violence. These are the chains of violence. Again, it is obvious that one will get both happiness and misery in life. Miseries will come after happiness and happiness after miseries. Therefore, we must keep perseverance and should never be inclined to any evil act even though we may face miseries at present as it will surely be followed by happiness.

As Yudhishthira was expressing grief Vyasa put forward a very deep and philosophical consideration regarding who would be considered to be responsible for the people killed in the war. There might be four alternatives. These are:

- 1) God may be considered responsible as he is the director of all.
- 2) The person who kills others is responsible.
- 3) The ill intention of the person who did violent act is responsible.
- 4) The destiny is responsible.

If god is to be considered responsible for the violent activities then it can be said that man does good or bad thing being directed by God. So, the effect should also rest upon him. If it is the person to be held responsible who kills anyone then Yudhishthira has certainly done good act as he killed only those who did violent activities. If we take the next option Yudhishthira could not be entitled to be responsible as because according to the behaviouralists also Yudhishthira could never be connected with evil activities. Regarding destiny to be responsible it can be

admitted as because there cannot be any effect without cause .The destiny is the cause as it gives rise to the good and the bad effect. Therefore, Yudhisthira was not responsible for all that happened during the war. The chief purpose of the war was to achieve Dharma.

We find in the 56th chapter that anger is the root cause of violence .Causes of destruction is of 18 types. These are broadly subdivided into two categories. One is *kamaja* i.e. those activities that come out of attachment and the other is *krodhaja*, i.e.activities that come out of anger. Lessons of non- violence are also imparted in the 60<sup>th</sup> chapter while Bhishma told Yudhisthira the duties of the four classes of viz., Brahmana, ksatriya,Vaishya and Shudra. Ahimsa is attributed to all these sections of people. Nine qualities which are commonly attributed to the people of the society are: not showing anger to anyone, speaking through enjoyment of wealth after proper distribution, forgiveness, continuation of one's lineage through wife, non –violence, simplicity, purity, sustainability people who are worthy. To be more specific, the sole duty of the Brahmanas is to keep the feelings of brotherhood and fraternity to all the living beings. Therefore, the Brahmanas are called the friend (*maitra*) of all. He should not hate anyone. He should behave each and every one amiably<sup>4</sup>-

Bhishma unfolds that the concept of Dharma came into vogue so that all living beings can live in harmony. The chief aim of Dharma is to bring prosperity and welfare to all .Dharma is that essence which is associated with ahimsa and ahimsa only.<sup>5</sup>

The story of the king Paurika occurring in the 110<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Santi Parvan is a good example of non- violence where it is shown that Paurika was very cruel and he did many violent activities. Gradually, he became sick and died. In the next birth he became a fox due to his previous sinful activities and it made him very sad. He wanted to purify his sin . He stopped being violent. He stopped even taking meat of other creatures. This new pure attitude towards his life made others of his creed jealous and they started insisting him to take meat. After listening to them carefully he said that it is due to the bad instinct that others do not believe them. In spite of living in forest he would now do such noble activities that would bring fame to their creed. Therefore, it is not the place that we live but the inner nature and intention that directs us to be in -clined to the path of non-violence.

The story of Kayabya occurring in the 135<sup>th</sup> chapter gives the lesson of ahimsa. Even being the son of a hunter he did not show violence. While giving lessons of non -violence to other demons he said that it is bad to kill the women folk, afraid ones, children and the sages .Respect towards women should always be shown.<sup>6</sup>

Another incident that bespeaks the treatment of ahimsa is that of Satya, a Brahmin who lived in Vidarbha. He once decided to perform a sacrifice .There were only some tasteless and bitter things available around him like *Suryapani* ,*suvarcala* etc. But due to severe penance of the Brahmin everything became very delicious. He performed the whole procedure by adopting not a single instance of non- violence. Pushkarini , Satya's wife adopted an ethical life. She managed to make her attire by knitting the fallen tree leaves and the old wings of the peacocks. Everyone in the society is expected to follow the path of non –violence. Expectation rises to higher level from the sages. In fact, the seers are the exponents of non- violence. In the 278<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Santi Parvan sage Harit says about the desirable attitude, behaviour and principles to be adopted by the seers. A sage should never see , think or speak about other's fault .A seer should not show violence to any creature nor should he give pain to others .They are strictly prohibited to show any rivalry towards others. Even if someone becomes rude to them he should not react in the same way .On the contrary, his duty is to show the right and the modest way of conduct. Further, he can beg only at the time when there will be no smoke coming out of the kitchen, when everyone else in the family has taken meal and the fire places become cool. It means no one should get the least disturbance by the sages.

The conversation between Jajali and Tuladhara in the 262<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the present Parvan beautifully teaches us the lesson of non-violence. There was a Brahmin named Jajali while Tuladhar belonged to Vaisya who earned his livelihood by selling different types of things like juices, perfumes, medicinal items etc. Tuladhara had good knowledge on Dharma and therefore ,he was once asked by Jajali to teach him the knowledge of Dharma .Tuladhara expressed his happiness for procuring a good profession as because he should not do any violence act . He made his home by those woods and grasses that are cut by others .He never took resort to falsehood in selling his goods .He further said that that particular man only knows Dharma who is a friend of all beings and who becomes engaged in helping others through mind ,space and action . He asked Jajali to consider him to be that person who sees patch of clay ,stone and even gold as equal .Tuladhara said that it gives him pain to see a bull being captured and used to carry goods on it, eating of meat by humans, making other people their slaves as people can earn their livelihood by themselves by utilizing the elements of the sun, the moon ,wind, Brahman ,Prana, sacrifices and the god of death .These elements exist in the five sense organs of every human being. So to kill a person is to kill those elements also.

The Mahabharata instructs us to be non-violent towards animals. The Mahabharata instructs us to be kind towards them. Here, goat has been identified as form of Agni, the sheep as that of Varuna, the earth as the form of Virat. Like that the cow and cattle are the form of the Moon. The sin gained by giving pain to these innocent animals is more afflicted than the sin gained by aborting embryo. Tuladhara further spoke about the greatness of Vedic sacrifice. The Vedas suggest us to offer only those offerings which do not cause harm to anyone. Sacrifices can be done using *namaskar*, *swadhyaya* (study of the Vedas), ghee, rice etc.

### III. DIMENSIONS OF AHIMSA AS FOUND IN THE SANTI PARVAN

We all know that the very concept of ahimsa draws many dimensions. It is a multifaceted concept. It reveals that the tendency of being inclined to non-violence comes from truthfulness, i.e. satya. Bhisma narrated the underlying characteristics of satya. There are 13 different types of truthfulness. These are:<sup>7</sup>

1) satya 2) samata, 3) dama, 4) amatsaryam, 5) lajja, 6) , 7) titiksa, 8) anasuyata, 9) tyaga, 10) aryata, 11) dhriti, 12) ksama 13) ahimsa

Satya is eternal. It is ever pervading. Constant meditation on one's duties brings truthfulness. Equality denotes the balanced behaviour towards friends and foes. Equality can be attained by being devoid of affection, hatredness, desire and anger. Dama means self command. It denotes steadiness, patience, shaking off fear, controlling the ailments of mind. Amatsaryam is the absence of jealousy. We can achieve this quality by observing truthfulness. Ksama i.e. forgiveness is always considered to be the best policy and code of conduct we may ever achieve. Lajja is shamefulness. If a person becomes ashamed of every misdeed he will refrain himself from further misdeed. Titiksa is the tolerance of the pain which is received while attaining dharma and artha. Aryata is the best attitude which is conducted through noble and useful activities towards others. Dhriti is that state of mind when a person no longer feels any difference between pleasure and pain. The next quality is the chief point of discussion where it has been mentioned earlier that non-violence sustains when we never do any harmful activities towards others through our body, mind and speech. If a person can attain these qualities he shall be able to lead a peaceful life.

### IV. REASONS BEHIND BEING INDULGED IN VIOLENCE

The Santi Parvan provides the reasons behind a person's intentions that provoke him to be indulged in violence. In the 163<sup>rd</sup> chapter Yudhisthira asked Bhisma regarding the diversified ill habits that subsist in human beings. He wanted to know where from anger, attachment, pathos, desire, intention to do against the instruction of the scriptures, mentality to kill others, taking wine, greed, jealousy etc arise. Bhisma says that all those are the enemies of human which bring only destruction to them. These habits are nothing but the sources of pain that people get. After that Bhisma started to recount the causes and mode of these ill habits one by one.<sup>8</sup>

Anger comes out of greed. When we start seeing other's fault it increases and forgiveness lessens it. Affection arises through mental resolution (*sankalpa*). It increases through addiction and gets destroyed as soon as the wise person becomes displeased with it. Anger and greed enhance the ill motive of killing others. Detachment and tenderness or compassion towards other fellow can finally emancipate this violent nature. Delusion of mind (*moha*) arises through ignorance. When a person becomes more inclined to sinful acts it becomes increased. In order to decrease it a person should follow the instruction of the learned people. When a person starts doing things that are detrimental to scriptures he gradually becomes indulged in evil activities. Going against the norms of the society brings ill temperament. Loss of near and dear ones brings pathos. It becomes released from the realization that nothing lasts long. One should know this universal truth that everything will come to its end one day. Anger, greed and practice over evil deed give rise to the intensification of killing others. It gets destroyed through the disaffection and detachment from all the living beings. Jealousy arises when one violates truthfulness and discards the company of honest people. Therefore, we should always take the company of noble people. Pride is another enemy that exists in us. People take pride of their family background, knowledge and prosperity. Getting valid knowledge of the nature of things helps us to become humble. Everything except valid knowledge is temporary. We must keep doing dignified works on the basis of equality.

These are the features that make a person so much affected that they take the resort to violence.

### V. ATONEMENT OF NON-VIOLENCE

Santi Parvan discusses the ways applying which one can come out violent acts. Proper measurement can lessen unwanted works in the society. If a violent person is given proper understanding of life along with due punishment he can be turned back into the right track of life. The 165<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Santi Parvan particularly deals with atonement applying which one can come out that unwanted perimeter of life. Bhisma tells Yudhisthira that it becomes the duty of the king to offer the same thing to a Brahmana if his richest have been taken away by someone as because the Brahmana should not get any impediment in the performance of their duties. Brahmana should never be the victims of violence. Strict punishment is ascribed to those persons who kill an embryo. Such persons

were to be killed by weapons in the battlefield or he was to purified himself getting into fire .They were not allowed to live in that society anymore. Again if someone killed a pregnant lady then he receives seen which is two times more than the killing of a Brahmana. If someone kills a Brahmana he has to lead a life like a Brahmacharin. He is to pass two years like this. After that he is to offer 100 bulls and hundred cows .In case of killing a Shudra one has to offer one bull and 100 cows .Same rule was applicable to the person who killed animals. Punishment was incorporated to the people who deceived wife or husband. We have seen that the Epic repeatedly instructs us not to take any violent act .We are suggested to adopt a peaceful life .We should speak sweet words .We are to think the auspiciousness of other fellows .The mind should think about the welfare of the whole world.

## VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up it can be said that the Santi Parvan is the stock house of the concept of ahimsa together with many aspects of human life. It expresses different layers of this aspect. Extracting examples from practical life, be it of a king's life or that of an ordinary person the epic again and again explores that violence is not at all a solution to any of the problems associated with our life. Rather, it is the biggest source of destruction. As against to it non-violence is a big full stop to the unwanted evil scenario of life. Today's world is loaded with the worries, difficulties, conflicts .These lead people to be more attached with violent activities. In such prevailing situation lessons found in the epic can be a way to bring such people back to right way of life. The present paper is just a brief outline of a single parvan of the Mahabharata. In all the chapters of the classic we find ample discourse on life lessons. It's our duty is survey these texts and make them easily accessible to every section of the society.

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5. *ahimsarthaya bhutanang dharmapravacanang krtam yah syadahimsasamprktah sa dharma iti niscayah* 12/109<sup>th</sup> chapter, *ibid.*
6. *ma vadhistvang striyang bhirung ma sisung ma tapaswinang na yudhamano hantavyo na ca grahya balaat stryah* 13/135<sup>th</sup>chapter.
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