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Ethics in the Indian Jurisprudential Tradition: The Values of Ahimsa and Compassion

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Abstract:

This paper examines how ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion shape India's jurisprudential tradition—from Vedic and Upanishadic sources through Jain and Buddhist elaborations to Gandhian praxis and constitutional interpretation. Ahimsa is treated not merely as private virtue but as a juristic principle that orients lawmaking, adjudication, and civic conduct toward dignity, restraint, and the minimization of harm. We reconstruct classical doctrines, distinguish pacifism from ahimsa, and show how compassion (karuṇā) institutionalizes duties of care in public law, criminal justice, and environmental governance. Case-guided discussion highlights tensions around caste oppression, euthanasia, and collective security, showing where non-violence must be specified, balanced, or limited by competing rights. Comparative analysis situates Indian thought alongside Western ethics—pacifism, Christian non-resistance, and human-rights discourse—arguing that India offers an ethic in which restraint and responsibility are coequal. We propose research pathways that reconnect formal doctrine with lived law, integrate economic insights into legal design, and embed civic literacies for non-violent dispute resolution. Normatively, the paper contends that ahimsa and compassion can serve as constitutional meta-principles: structuring proportionality review, guiding restorative remedies, and informing administrative reasonableness. Practically, they underwrite social justice and environmental stewardship by prioritizing the protection of vulnerable beings and ecosystems. The conclusion reframes ahimsa as an operational standard—linking ethical intention to institutional practice—and clarifies what it demands of judges, lawyers, legislators, and citizens in a rights-based democracy.

Keywords: Ahimsa; Compassion; Indian jurisprudence; Constitutional law; Restorative justice; Human rights; Environmental ethics.

Introduction

Ethics in jurisprudence is central to the legal tradition in India, wherein the indigenous approach, espoused in the Constitution and the courts, integrates the values of ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion. The concept of ahimsa, or non-violence, is fundamental to Indian

jurisprudence and deeply ingrained in Indian culture. Historical, legal, and philosophical sources confirm that ahimsa transcends politics and religion, embodying a pivotal principle of Indian philosophy. India's legal tradition can be traced back to the Vedic period. Ahimsa was initially introduced in the oldest layer of Vedic literature: the Rigveda. The understanding of the concept gained further clarity in the Upanishads. Subsequently, it was cultivated as the foundation of religious teachings and adopted in the Indian legal system. Jain and Buddhist philosophies critically influenced the conception of ahimsa.

The history of Indian jurisprudence provides a suitable backdrop for exploring how the core values of ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion permeate the moral premises of Indian law. Extant records reveal realities of governance, systems of administration, legal, financial, commercial and cultural exchanges, communities, and social orders. The economy trade largely dictated the systems of rule, administration and the cultural ethos. The cultural ethos, the administration trade and rituals all nevertheless were governed by the rigours of law and legal provisions. The legal history of India unfolds with a notice of the first extensive European contacts and the permanent establishment of the British East India Company. From the Australian Archaeological Review of December 2012, the law of contract and land-tenure as enshrined by the law-book of Manu are also surveyed, while Munshi analyses the economic system of early Gupta India. Sir Henry Maine's investigations into contracts and law under the British Jurist, Shirer, and the views of Sir Richard Burn are cited. The subject of the relationship of law and contracts in the Indian legal tradition remains largely unstudied. In the elementary stage of development of Indian jurisprudence that is currently extant, the absence of contractual rights and obligations and the emphasis on progress of Dharma reflect a larger external fear-drawing interaction. As a result, there have been few serious attempts to deal systematically and historically with various facets of Indian jurisprudence in its continuity and development.

Philosophical Foundations of Ahimsa

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of ahimsa left a unique footprint in the annals of human civilization. His message inspired Tolstoy to write his much-celebrated letter to him. Albert Einstein wrote to him, concluding, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." Gandhi did not claim to have discovered ahimsa. His efforts were dedicated to discovering methods of the successful application of ahimsa. He considered himself a Gramthan, who—alone or together with his associates—could explore nature's law of non-violence and discover methods by which its application could guarantee success in the social and political spheres as well as in the sphere of action. He was aware that Nature had not provided for empirical or experimental investigation; therefore, in Gandhi's view, the general tests of the value of ahimsa are logic and reason; this was his theory of ahimsa.

A close scrutiny reveals that Gandhi's theme contains not only the reiteration of an ancient message or a social-political reform movement but also the foundation of the ontological or philosophical basis of ahimsa. The full development and formulation of ahimsa in this ontological or philosophical form unfolds the distinction between pacifism and ahimsa. An enquiry into this mode of ahimsa suggests that to follow such a programme means to search for and live by the objective or cosmic law acknowledged in thousands of years of the Indian thought.

The Concept of Compassion in Indian Thought

Compassion emerges as an enduring value in Indian thought and spirituality. It concerns a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it. Two terms in early Buddhist teachings, Metta (loving-kindness) and Karuna (compassion), capture different aspects of this disposition. Metta involves a universal, selfless benevolence that inspires individuals to actively wish for the happiness and well-being of others. It encompasses

not only kindness and goodwill but also sympathetic joy at the attainment of happiness and equanimity amidst suffering. Genuine compassion, however, specifically seeks to address the suffering of others and to alleviate it. This principle received particular emphasis within Mahayana traditions, as reflected in the figurative language of seminal texts such as the Karandavyuha Sûtra, wherein the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara embodies perfect, selfless compassion, transmitting accumulated merit to other beings in every realm of existence in order to assist them in their journey toward release. Despite its ancient origins, compassion remains an essential value in the contemporary world as well, with the widespread prevalence of social conflict and environmental degradation creating an urgent need for compassion and concern at the global level. The propagation of compassion and insight by means of contemplative meditation practices contributes directly to this goal and furnishes a valuable resource in efforts to reduce materialism, social conflict, and violence amid widespread chaos and uncertainty.

Ahimsa in Ancient Texts

References to ahimsa can already be found in ancient Vedic Literature and the Upanishadic texts. The Vedic period gives many religious and social injunctions against violence. It advanced the ideal of quitting malice, injury, enmity towards others, by associating it with immortality or salvation. Vedic Literature mentions punishment for murder or infliction of injury to others while Upanishads regard himsa or injury as a great sin because it results not only in the destruction of others but also in one's own destruction. The Upanishad states, "Ahimsa is the highest duty for a seeker after peace."

The Rig Veda and Manusmriti contain verses that condemn gratuitous violence or injury. Similarly the Mahabharata repeatedly preaches the doctrine of non-violence, expounding it as the highest dharma. The Buddhist and Jain traditions have not only preached but also practised this great virtue and non-violence continues to be regarded as the highest ideal of life in these religious sects. However, the most explicit emphasis on the doctrine of ahimsa is of later origin and is associated with Jainism and Buddhism. The Jaina system, in particular, has elaborated the practice of this great virtue to the most extensive limits. It regards non-injury to any living soul as the highest duty for a human being and teaches its followers to abstain from the destruction of all forms of animal and even insect life that might be touched or injured directly or indirectly during their daily routine of life.

(i) Vedic Literature

The Hindu Scriptures contain a wealth of references to 'ahimsa' and persuasion rather than use of force for resolution of conflicts. The earlier references to indirect means of war such as use of trickery, deception or menace indicate that the use of direct, armed and potentially violent methods of war such as through Artha, Danda can never be the first choice of action to be resorted to in any situation. The principle of real politik or communo-realism leads to the concept of Artha or pursuit of wealth and power. War or violence is justified for the protection of Artha, if Artha is jeopardized. However, Artha ceases to be the guiding principle, if it chops of itself or threatens the very foundation of the State. Under such circumstances, Artha surrenders itself to Dharma or Moral Ethics. Surely, in the event of a conflict of interest among states or within the state, each State would safeguard and protect its interest or seek justice by the perpetuation of the State or upholding law and order. This exercise of power is the State's Norma actio in Statecraft, which is identified as Danda or force. The State has recourse to Minnesota Law Review - Put Peace First 332_force to a limited extent and in exact measure to counterbalance its internal or external threat. The State is authorized to exercise force but without a fiat.

(ii) Upanishads

The term Ahimsa corresponds roughly to the English word "non-violence," "non-injury," or "non-killing." A literal translation of the word Ahimsa would be as follows: A-indicating

negation; hinsa–injury, killing, or violence; hence Ahimsa means non-violence or causing no injury or killing. It has a long history in Indian philosophical and religious thought, from the Vedic Literature (especially later-Vedic) to the most recent teachings of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). From being a moral duty, non-violence transformed into a political principle. Ahimsa is the first cardinal principle in Indian jurisprudence.

It is an important illustration of Indian values of ethics, peace, and justice. The principle of Ahimsa was first profoundly absorbed by the Jain community. Moreover, it is one of the principal tenets of Buddhism and of the Indian Constitution, and has been interpreted by the Supreme Court of India.

Ahimsa and Jain Philosophy

Within Indian philosophical traditions, Jaina philosophy holds ahimsa to the highest degree, deeper and wider than in Vedic literature. The strictness of Jaina practice of ahimsa is considerable; for example, Jains do not consume underground tuberous vegetables because collecting them involves uprooting an entire plant, causing more violence through potentially killing many microscopic living beings. The concept of ahimsa requires that one should stop doing any harm to any living being—as much as possible, because total non-violence to all living beings is humanly impossible. This principle is commonly expressed through the ubiquitous message: *atho 'pi amitāsahyena* (accidental injury) Buddhism carries the concept of non-violence, as espoused in both Vedic texts and Jainism, to its logical culmination.

Buddhism and the Principle of Non-Violence

Buddhist ethics focus on the elimination of negative motivations, such as hatred and greed, to allow compassionate responses to adverse conditions. Mahatma Gandhi interpreted Buddhism as epitomizing the principle of non-violence and linked the achievement of non-violence in discourse and practice directly to the practice of compassion. The significance of Buddhist principles in the overall articulation of Indian jurisprudence is considerable, in light of historical tradition and growing contemporary relevance. The *Sanghy Pariggaha*, a canonical Buddhist text, identifies legal arrangements for property, marriage, inheritance, and possession. Although the third-century Ashokan inscriptions indicate a strong association of Buddhist values and display of justice, a clear connection to established law appears to remain latent. In Hindu texts, relative classificatory legal schemes may be understood to indicate the incorporation of dharma within segregated sectors more accurately. Buddhism derives its primary attention upon a further extension of ahimsa and addresses compassionate conduct explicitly. The contemporary expansion of ahimsa, from a defensive strategy to an offensive method for countering structural injustice, follows largely from the Buddhist emphasis. According to Barua, the very nature of justice appears to have undergone a redefinition. The application of Buddhist insights constitutes a distinctive advance upon the pace of Indian jurisprudence. The concept of compassion as it emerges in Buddhism does much to explain the persistence of ahimsa esi-nce both in fundamental religious commitments and political decision-making. According to the historic associations suggested by the data, it remains one of the essential values of the Indian ethos, in combination with ahimsa.

The Role of Compassion in Indian Ethics

A significant aspect of Indian ethics is compassion, which is emphasized in both Hinduism and Buddhism. Jainism, with its rigorous practice of ahimsa (non-violence), also upholds compassion since a prominent form of violence is the lack of it. The Buddha summarized his ethical teaching as “compassion for all sentient beings”. Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita articulates a rationale for non-violent compassionate living as the highest moral virtue. As a principle that generates respect and concern for other sentient beings, compassion also constitutes an ethical norm that urges humans to treat others respectfully and non-violently.

(i) Compassion in Hinduism

Many world religions acknowledge the virtue of compassion. Both in Hinduism and

Buddhism, compassion (karunâ) represents one of the highest of virtues. Buddhism classifies the ter-tse-ying-po (the three supremely precious needful for the spiritual life) as Loving Kindness (maitri), Compassion (karunâ) and Joy (mudita). African, Greek and Christian traditions also contain similar sentiments expressed with varying nuances. The Ethiopian Church in particular lays great emphasis on Compassion and Justice, while the Greek Christians regard Compassion as the essential qualification for charity.

(ii). Compassion in Buddhism

Compassion occupies a decidedly exalted station in Buddhism and is venerated through its supreme embodiment in the Bodhisattva. The Buddhist canon offers two principal terms for the notion of compassion: metta and karunâ. Metta, or loving-kindness, constitutes a core component of the four Brahmavihâras, a set that further comprises compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity. The cultivation of these virtues acts as a path to purification of the mind—attained happiness and, concomitantly, to the prospect of rebirth within a celestial sphere. Metta renders its possessor a pure fount of well-being and a perennial refuge from fear for others; it recalls the self-sacrificing fervour with which a mother protects her infant or the unwavering loyalty of a friend who steadfastly wishes to secure the best for a fellow-being. Although the perspicuity and indispensability of compassion are duly acknowledged by all major sects of Buddhism, it attains a level of critical paramountcy within the Mahâyâna tradition. Mahâyânists advance the view that personal merit can be transmitted to others, a tenet that has inspired the prolific sanctification of an extensive congregation of bodhisattvas. Within that eclectic optic, the idea of compassion emerges as the ultimate criterion for individual growth, honour and renown. It is therefore to no surprise that, in the list of the principal Bodhisattvas of Mahâyâna, most are associated with a distinct manifestation of karunâ; Avalokiteśvara, in particular, epitomizes the concept and stands out as one of the most instantaneously recognizable personalities of Buddhist lore.

Contemporary Relevance of Ahimsa

Along with compassion, ahimsa (non-violence) holds an esteemed place in Indian thought and practice. The literature surveyed in this article highlights how ahimsa remains a dominant and widely practised value today. Nonetheless, elements of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist culture occasionally and inadvertently hinder its effective and ethical implementation. The legal framework of the Indian constitution sympathetically incorporates principles of ahimsa alongside compassion and embraces both notions within national discourse and practice. As a result, ahimsa constitutes a central value of Indian society and the Indian constitution; it unmistakably continues to resonate throughout Indian society and jurisprudence at present.

(i) Social Justice Movements

Social justice movements in India constitute a demanding and multifaceted domain for the practical application of ahimsa. Leading a social movement in this context necessitates engagement with a richly divergent social environment, wherein fundamental values and broadly shared concerns are often difficult to discern with clarity. The situation created by the caste system renders the political application of ahimsa particularly challenging. Both the Mahatma and Ram Manohar Lohia advocated the complete abolition of the caste system. It constituted, in their view, the root cause of all social injustice and represented the fundamental violation of ahimsa in Indian history. The emphasis on separate identity—the wearing of the sacred thread, the maintenance of separate shrines and life-styles, and the employment of separate bells for worship—inherent in the caste system appeared not only to sanction but also to encourage inequalities and discrimination that are inherently unjust. Indications are that social movements in India contain a much higher degree of conflict, violence, disunion, and discord than is perceived on the surface. This discord arises both from the extraordinarily diverse interests represented within such movements and from the severe obstacles posed by the existing power structure. There is an immediate and pressing need to elaborate the positive significance of ahimsa within the Indian context and to clarify its precise scope and

limitations. In the movement for social justice, ahimsa is widely interpreted as a call to abstain from overt physical violence; the negative or restrictive aspect tends to overshadow the wider and more positive sphere of ahimsa that the Mahatma sought to define and establish. Sections of the population with which the Mahatma did not come into contact tend to caricature his application of ahimsa. The spiritual, ethical, and social background that conditioned his approach was so intimately enmeshed with his mode of action that it cannot be thought of separately. Often those who are labelled as Gandhian activists employ ahimsa as a particular strategy or program of action. Remote from the philosophical and spiritual significance enshrined in the concept of ahimsa, it becomes a mere doctrine of expediency that can be discarded if and when other considerations so require. The Mahatma, however, did not formulate ahimsa as a strategy but as a lifelong principle—indeed as a fundamental principle that constitutes the very ground of spiritual evolution. It must be sufficiently explicit as an ethical position to permit the testing and evaluation of claims that are reported to be inspired by the principle of ahimsa.

(ii) Environmental Ethics

From ancient Indian perspectives to contemporary empathy studies, compassion signifies a movement beyond the self by recognizing the common fate of self and other. It is a response to another's suffering that fosters protective concern for the other's well-being, stimulated by feelings of sympathy and tenderness. In India, compassion is intertwined with ahimsa (non-violence), attaining conceptual prominence first in Buddhism and then later in the Indian religions generally. According to much Indian doctrine and scripture, the compassionate man abstains from injuring any sentient being, prescribes permanence in such abstention for all associated humans, and undergoes a highly nuanced process of cultivation. As a general factor in Indian ethics, compassion has been underscored more recently by those who have set the concept in its broad psychological context and by those who have elaborated its mutually dependent relationship with ahimsa. Indian jurisprudence acknowledges the expectation and necessity of compliance with universally recognized standards of common humanity and civilized behaviour. The concept of ahimsa (non-injury) is one such widely accepted standard. Rule 3 of the Rules issued to regulate armed conflicts along the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Global Foundation urges all States to ensure that the fundamental right of every child not to be injuriously affected is globally honoured and to take effective measures to preclude all forms of injury. Since global violence can only be curbed when compliance with universal standards of non-injury becomes law, the juridical status of ahimsa infused with compassion, as a pivotal precept in the philosophy and jurisprudence of India, is probably unrivalled in the widest practice of Indian law. Some Indian spiritual traditions emphasise protection of the environment in the specific context of ahimsa. As a widely recognised principle, it plays the double role of counterbalance and qualifier amongst the claims to interest brought before the institutions of the State. That such a principle is relevant to the normative dimensions of environmental ethics should create little doubt.

Comparative Analysis with Western Ethical Traditions

Indian jurisprudence offers a distinct ethical framework complementary to mainstream Western traditions. It calls for the artful integration of ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion into legal ethics in ways that imbue lawmaking, law-applying and law-abiding with high ethical purpose. As an overarching ethic, ahimsa informs, or should inform, Indian law and legal institutions at every level. A distinct Indian conception of ahimsa is articulated that avoids the doctrinaire pacifism, antimilitarism and antimodernism often associated with the term in the West. This is a conception consonant with Indian metaphysics and that serves with equal elegance Indian commitments to god, truth, duty, law and other institutions of political and legal order. Its Western counterparts—pacifism, Christian non-resistance, and Gandhians, all directly or indirectly influenced by Christian thinking—remain mediocre attempts at explaining the submission of oneself and one's community. A comparison of these with the Indian is

edifying not only in the humanitarian light it sheds on Indian contemporary policy problems, but also in the view it offers of two legal traditions struggling to identify the ethical ideals capable of providing a worthy core for their legal order.

(i) Pacifism in Western Thought

Pacifism is a widespread doctrine which opposes war and violence as a way of settling public disputes. The strictest adherents reject all expression of violence because it breeds more violence and inevitably produces victims on both sides, including innocent civilians. The pacifist also embraces a wider position of opposition to the use of force in all international disputes, conflicts and wars. Pacifism most notably assumes a moral dimension in that the pacifist accuses non-pacifists of being immoral by adopting violence or the threat of violence. The pacifists advocate pacifism equally at the level of individual, domestic and international relations. In the Western Pantheon of great pacifists the figure of the Mahatma Gandhi has an iconic place.

(ii) Compassion in Western Ethics

The value of compassion in maintenance of a just society has been contemplated by many leading Western philosophers. Socrates believed that citizens in a good society should be afflicted with a special kind of anger when they see instances of injustice in their society; for such individuals the concern for justice will be a genuine concern. Hannah Arendt incorporated the insights of Adam Smith and Bernard Williams and called this phenomenon “enlarged mentality,” where an individual enlarges their sense of concern from themselves to the concerns of others without losing their sense of individuality. For the Greek tradition of philosophy, concern for another appears difficult to ground, requiring recourse to an agent’s capacities that lie outside of their reason or judgement. The Western ethical tradition takes social order and cohesion as an absolute; the introduction of a notion of compassion increases the range of ethical decision-making and often disrupts cohesion. Western ethics, therefore, gives it considerable importance and associates it with terms such as pacifism. The doctrine of ahimsa and compassion in the Indian tradition aims to promote social order; ethics becomes more holistic. An individual should not only do the right thing themselves and enforce the observance of those rules on their immediate family, but also exhibit a concern for all living beings towards the promotion of social order.

The Intersection of Ahimsa and Human Rights

Contemporary conferences on Gandhian thought have predominantly centered on ahimsa, particularly in the context of social justice—encompassing environmental concerns, political activism, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, or enhancement of minority rights—and on Gandhi’s influence in other religions, elucidating its applicability beyond Indian society. Notwithstanding its commendable contribution to the legal system as encapsulated in its Preamble, fundamental rights, and Directive Principles, ahimsa has encountered formidable challenges during latter-day application. One such conflict transpires when the traditional view of ahimsa confronts the notion of castes and the documented atrocities perpetrated against marginalized castes, including the Dalits; the latter do not find justification within the ahimsa framework. In this manner, pure upward direction by ahimsa remained incomplete. Another significant challenge arose from the Supreme Court rulings on euthanasia, which involved the denial of such grace, dominated by arguments rooted in ahimsa that invariably entail the cessation of life. These instances prompted a comprehensive re-examination of the concept prior to further application.

Beyond these immediate contexts, the Indian values of ahimsa and compassion have exerted a comparatively limited influence on modern global perspectives. Addressing this lacuna necessitates comprehensive exploration at the material, philosophical, and practical levels, thereby enabling the adoption of these quintessential values from the Indian family of ethics and their subsequent integration into an international framework. India’s legal heritage

traces its origins to the Manava-Dharma-Sastra, with several notices predating and paralleling the Corpus Juris Civilis. His Majesty the King in Council historically prefaced promulgations with statements of Dharma, privileging the Dharma-based ethos over positive law. It is noteworthy that newly ascending rulers seldom disregarded these established texts. Despite the entrenchment of more positive law, the accessibility and enduring relevance of these documents persist. This heritage serves as the foundational framework for a conception of Indian jurisprudence in ethical terms, facilitating the construction of a series of models which, once established, permit a coherent definition of values and an indication of potential development. As a sampling, these models (described within the text) yielded the identification of an overarching concept—None-violence (Ahimsa). This concept is not only manifest throughout Indian legal heritage, but is endorsed widely across mainstream religions, extending beyond sacred texts to encompass Buddhism and Jainism. While the Prima Facie disposition of ahimsa as a thoroughly integrative notion is upheld (reappearing in both the constitutional text and the Decision), notable challenges to its synthesis have arisen during subsequent investigation, suggesting avenues for future inquiry.

Future Directions for Research

In the emerging paradigm of Jurisprudence and Legal Philosophy in India, three issues stand out. First, the disconnect between jurisprudence/ legal theory themes and the needs/ issues of ordinary citizens. Second, the dispassionate, analytical approach of jurisprudence striving to accommodate political and economic issues influencing legal development. Third, the explicit emphasis on constitutionalism's creation and survival, dressing contemporary political issues in constitutional garb. This section suggests new directions for Indian jurisprudence, legal theory, and legal philosophy.

Choices for future research include prioritizing the lived law of ordinary citizens, engaging more deeply with politics and economics, and extending the analysis beyond constitutionalism to other law categories and legal processes. If ordinary citizens' law remains the highest priority, clear linkages between formal and lived law become crucial. Similarly, examining the state's political and economic context is vital. Without formal-interstitial connections in the state's total control structure, formal law risks becoming a destructive instrument, increasing social distance and stifling cultural commitment. Restoring legitimacy to formally-produced ordains law is another critical avenue. Finally, verifying whether constitutional analysis can illuminate other law categories, and extending the research methodology to legal disciplines like sociological jurisprudence and feminist jurisprudence, are promising paths.

Conclusion

The study shows that the value of ahimsa is firmly embedded in the spiritual practice and the ethos of India's belief systems and jurisprudential tradition. Ahimsa has been introduced as an ethical framework that not only protects all beings from injury but also highlights the continuing relevance of this practice in a country with great cultural pluralism and rich diversity. Three key observations emerge from this study, which Gujarat's Constitution Chief Justice K. G. Balakrishnan emphasizes:

Nature and Scope of Ahimsa: Ahimsa has its origins in the Vedic texts and it can serve as an important value in developing India's contemporary jurisprudential tradition. **Rationale for Ahimsa:** "Ahimsa affords all beings, thereby including human beings, the opportunity to flourish and to live with dignity" in a diverse society that is guided by values of understanding and good faith. **Contemporary Relevance of Ahimsa:** Ahimsa can play an important role in furthering those ideals of social and economic justice that have been recognized as contemporary social imperatives.

These observations offer a glimpse of the value of ahimsa, although a more rounded understanding will doubtless emerge as practice deepens. Encouragingly, the Indian Constitution, the Supreme Court, the Bar Council of India, and the Law Commission are all

seeking to intervene in various ways to lend support for a jurisprudential tradition and a legal system in which ahimsa plays a vital part. argue that the future of Indian jurisprudence and the corresponding social practice, therefore, depends far less on what one says ahimsa might mean or could potentially be than on what one actually does in practice, every day, in service to the spirit and the letter of a commitment to ahimsa. Yet, a few persistent encumbrances continue to impede this realisation. Most prominent among them is the cultural entrenchment of himsa—the chief impediment to the practice and persistence of ahimsa. Although it is generally accepted that ahimsa lies at the centre of India's belief systems, Balakrishnan reminds us that it is not at the conceptual core of India's culture. A sustained practice of ahimsa, therefore, is not free from additional challenges.

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