

Thematic Paper Title : The Development of Ahimsa in Buddhism:
 A Case Study of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, USA
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Date of Completion : 31 July 2010

ABSTRACT

This study consists of 2 objectives namely: - to study the concept and the development of Ahimsa in Buddhism, and to study the development and the applications of Ahimsa of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, USA.

From the research, it is found that the concept of ahimsa was known before the Buddha's era. The doctrine is common to many Indian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. Ahimsa or Ahimsa-Dharma is the same word and has the same meaning. While Ahimsa is a universal word, Ahimsa-Dharma an emphasized word used in religions teaching.

Ahimsa or Ahimsa-Dharma was found first in the Vedic period but it was mentioned loosely, such as men should not be harmed because both sentient beings and non-sentient beings came from God. Therefore, men should pay respect and do not injure each others. During the Brahmin era, the doctrine was changed especially on the activity of sacrifice. The animal sacrifice was used and that inferred the violence. During Buddhist's propagation the belief was under pressure, as a result the Brahmin's doctrine was tremendously reformed and became Hinduism. Men should practice ahimsa in order to lead to God. In addition, the major religion existed before Buddhism is Jainism which also prescribed the ahimsa as a highest principle.

In the Buddha's time, ahimsa is emphasized on the body, speech and mind which are originated from mental action. Ahimsa normally manifests by compassion

(*karuna*). The doctrine of ahimsa is explained in Right Thought, the second fold of the Noble Eightfold Path. Nowadays ahimsa is used more clearly in pragmatic way. Ahimsa is comprised of the three factors of Right Mindfulness, Right View and Right Effort. It is also found that ahimsa is one of the main doctrines for human development according to the Threefold Training – *sīla*, “non-violent ethical behavior”, *Samādhi*, “stable psychology” and *Paññā*, “non-violent thought and view”.

Ahimsa has its development. The development and understanding varies depending on the contexts of the complex societies. It is found that the explanation of ahimsa covers not only the individual behaviors but also the wider social aspects such as citizen's liberty and rights, justice, equity in tax payment, etc. And the democratic characteristic as demonstrated in Buddhism will bring the balance in social structure and will finally bring about the equality and brotherhood which are essential for creating peace.

Ahimsa is a process, not the dogma which means that it must be practiced in daily life such as loving-kindness and compassion, precepts, non-killing, harmlessness, having wisdom of the Three Characteristics, the Dependent Origination and awareness. It is also found that ahimsa is possible only when the problem of violence is confronted through awareness (*sati*) and *paññā*.

Ahimsa sometimes is translated as nonviolence but the definition of these two words is different. Ahimsa has broader meaning than nonviolence. Nonviolence normally uses on the physical aspects such as no destruction, no killing, no force or armed usage. While ahimsa covers on physical, speech and mental aspects and it must come with good intention, good view, and truth. So the meaning of ahimsa has much deeper than that of nonviolence.

The Dalai Lama, the spiritual Tibetan leader and the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh teach the principle of ahimsa extensively and demonstrate it through political, social and environmental aspects. In addition, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh applied ahimsa according to concept of socially engaged Buddhism.

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) in the United States of America was established during the politically and socially tense/polarized period that followed the end of World War II and Vietnamese War. The move was principally aimed at healing spiritual wounds and contributing positively to the community and in particular raising awareness on the negative impact of using of violence as a tool in conflict solution. The BPF is the oldest and the most notable socially engaged Buddhist movement in USA. From the research, it is found that the ahimsa and nonviolence are applied in many projects. For the most important project, it is found that it is not just the way for human development - the threefold Training but it also follows according to the three merits namely, generosity, moral precepts and mind development.

The concepts of establishing the organization and the doctrines which are applied in many projects by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship are operated using mainly the interpretation from Mahayana Buddhism, especially Zen, which is in harmony with the original American way of life, itself is influenced by Christianity, focusing on serving the community and a democratic way of life i.e. equality and brotherhood. The BPF's philosophy fits in with movements for social engagement through national and international projects for the benefits, happiness, peace, justice and brotherhood of all humankind.