

Peace in the Gandhian Connotation

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The United Nations has declared the 21st Century as the Century of Peace and the first decade would be devoted to Peace and non-violent approaches of Mahatma Gandhi. In this context Nelson Mandela observed much early that ‘the 21st Century is going to be the Gandhian Century’.

H.G. Wells, the famous English Literary Personality and Futurologist, was once asked about the purpose of living. His reply was ‘happiness’. Happiness is intra-personal. But extra-personal also as a human being is both independent and dependant requiring congenial conditions around for proper growth and existence.

Happiness and Peace are co-terminus. Basically, though, happiness is a mental state and peace is a state of the society, a multi-dimensional concept with wider connotations. Peace thus incorporates happiness as well.

The Vedas sang in praise of Peace :

“Peace of the Sky, Peace of the Earth,
Peace of Trees, Peace of the Universe,
Peace come to me.....”

However, what we find and face today around us in this context?

Pritirim Sorokin, the modern-generation Social Scientist, has observed in his seminal book, ‘Reconstruction of Humanity’, dedicated to ‘one Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi’ that humanity, bleeding from war-wounds and frightened by atomic Frankenstein of destruction, was looking for a way out of the death-trap and wanted peace in place of war, love in lieu of hate. Mahatma Gandhi also told Maria Montessori, the Pioneer of Child Education, that consciously or unconsciously the world was hungering for peace and love.

The reason is not far to seek and today’s inter-action starts from here. We borrow the services of Prof. Sorokin again. He has described the present civilization as ‘Sense Civilization’ the dominant thrust and motivation being satisfaction of the senses or carnal pleasures. In the 18th Century we developed a new economic theory that advocated (Manchester School of Economics and Adam Smith and laissez faire), inter-alia, each for himself instead of each for the others and persuasion of a materialist philosophy. Ultimately it transformed the human being into the ‘Economic Man’. In the words of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore – “চিত্ত যেথা ছিল, সেথা এল দ্বারাশি” – the mind and heart were replaced by material considerations. T.S. Eliot wrote – “The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you / The desert is in the heart of your brother”.

Be it told in the Bible or the Puranas, at the time of the creation of the human beings, the predicament was a heaven on earth or 'Life Divine' or the persuasion of 'Godliness in human beings' – a blissful and peaceful existence. However, service of the Mammon had been found more lucrative outdistancing Peace, and Corruption, Terrorism and Global Warming are presently the three byproducts that have enhanced enough anxiety about a holocaust. A new Revolution could be the answer.

Peace is a broad concept with several dimensions – social-scientific, ethical, political, cultural, etc. It means freedom from strife, controversy or agitation, freedom from war, tranquility, concord, mental calm and serenity of mind. Peace is positive and depends on mutual trust and a strong sense of unity of mankind and promotion of equality and common welfare. Peace thus is a relationship between people and people and a harmony between individuals. Peace is also a value which includes justice, freedom, development and security. Johan Galtung, the eminent Peace Researcher, holds peace means absence of violence – violence standing here for exploitation, centralization or dominance or non-violence, non-dominance and decentralization – the three main pillars of Gandhiji's thoughts along with Truth. Galtung further holds that peace is negative when Wilson says "War to end all wars" or Mao says "War for permanent peace" and peace is positive when it endeavours to abolish structural violence through non-violent means.

Gandhiji had been called the "Apostle of Peace" and was one of the greatest Peace Activists. He believed that ultimate happiness lies in peace and peace is not a static concept but a dynamic, positive entity. In defining it he observes that it is antonym of violence. We know that Gandhiji provided a critic of the present trend of civilization and called it violent. It could, as such, be peaceless or non-peace. He also considered Love as an instrument of Peace without which a society would remain violent. Same is true for Truth and Non-Violence and the three aspects or social concepts, combined together, form Gandhiji's Non-Violent social order or a peaceful society. Gandhiji has described his society variously and they all have their own characteristics and significance individually, but underlying in them, as his wont, a single identity, the ensuring of a true humane world encompassing the whole of the universe as human beings are ought to the independent, yet inter-dependent. The ethos of the Indian culture were 'Atma Satyagraha' or self-restraint and 'Basudhaiva Kutubakam' or all, living or non-living, are related to us and Gandhiji, a thrown up of the Upanishad, incorporated these in his Social Philosophy.

Like all his social concepts peace to Gandhiji was also holistic and removal of the deterrents was his primary concern. As such he maintained that peace was not possible unless the causes of violence are removed from the roots and hence it was struggle-oriented. His theory of peace, therefore, advocated a revolutionary social change and a new logical approach to development. As such, those who intend to work for peace or catalysts for change should have to be whole-hearted practitioners exclusively concerned with the tasks of combating violence and tension in micro and macro levels. Gandhiji believed in the dictum 'think globally, act locally' for experimentation of his ideas, because he had a world-view and realised that unless and until all were touched and carried, his ultimate vision of an exploitation-free, egalitarian, peaceful world order would remain unfulfilled. He further advocated a training in Peace-action and ultimately raising a Peace-Brigade or Shanti Sainiks, a fearless, dedicated band of activists,

perhaps in the line of 'Khudai Khitmatgars' or 'Servants of God', non-violent soldiers, raised by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, the legendary Freedom Fighter, with many dimensions.

Gandhiji gave a new direction to Peace Research or added new dimensions. Peace Research earlier mainly concerned itself with problems of Peace and War. But new definition of Peace finds a close link between mal-development, poverty, structural, social and societal violence with wars and conflicts or peacelessness, and advocates initiation of actions at appropriate areas and at both the National and International levels, even at the village or small-community level for permanent resolution. Individuals also are expected to engage themselves in self-transformation through the practice of 'Eleven Vows' in their lives to become worthy citizens of the emerging society. Gandhiji was a thorough practitioner and for a peaceful social change towards a peaceful society he invented 'Satyagraha' – a peaceful, non-violent movement with a unique concept of 'self-punishment', which Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore called 'Gandhiji's gift of the fight' with many dimensions.

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia and Jaya Prakash Narayan, two great intellectuals and indefatigable, politico-social Activists, and Freedom Fighters, close to Mahatma Gandhi particularly from the mid-thirties of the last century, observed that 'Gandhiji and the Atom Bombs were two originals of our time and one would have to defeat the other' and 'Mahatma Gandhi was specifically a prophet of the 'Atomic Age' and unless forces of violence are defeated a total annihilation looms large. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. the Civil Rights Champion and American Gandhi, was more specific – 'the choice between mankind is either non-violence or non-existence'.

The fight is on and Albert Einstein, the Famous Scientist, pointed towards the Inspiration in the early 50's of the last Century – "Gandhian Philosophy would be the light house for the future generations".