Need for Peace Education

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It hardly needs any effort to emphasise the relevance of peace education in today's world driven by conflicts of all kinds— intra-state, inter-state, inter-ethnic, inter-communal, inter-class. Philosophers have regarded conflicts as natural and held that it arises out of the basic human instinct for aggression. The issue confronting us in the world today is how not to allow conflicts to descend into violence. The authors of the paper argue here that peace education with its emphasis on inter-cultural learning, inter-communal harmony and values of coexistence and tolerance may show the way. **[Editorial Board]**

The human society at present is torn asunder by conflicts of all types. This has led to destruction of the harmonious social fabric, which was the result of long enduring processes of history. Conflicts take place between individuals, organisations or groups. Conflict emerges whenever two or more persons seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space or the same exclusive position, play incompatible roles, pursue incompatible goals, or adopt mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes.

In these circumstances the sense of self-righteousness in these opposite camps very often becomes the locomotive of conflict, especially when each party thinks it is the sole repository of truth as much as the opposite one is of falsehood. And thus elimination or absolute domination of the 'other' becomes the central strategy of action. Ironically, the hate-factor that crops up between the two opposing parties often transforms itself into the central principle of identification for one another— each defines itself in terms of the 'other'. And once these conditions are fulfilled, the architecture of an irresoluble conflict slowly takes shape.

Conflict is natural

Political philosophers regard conflict as the product of human instinct. Various thinkers have also expounded this. Hobbes says man is essentially a creature moved by the basic elements like emotions and passions even if he is not devoid of reason. Reasoning is artificial, and passion is natural, he would say. Reason is the faculty, which enables a man to make a calculated move in a given set of circumstances[1]. Every man is flanked by men of his own type, each with more or less same desires and aversions and more or less equal powers, which Hobbes thinks, in terms of physical strength, wealth, reputation and honour. Because all men desire more or less the same things and they are roughly equal in strength and cunning, there is bound to be what he calls "war of every man against every man".

In Hobbesian concept of human nature man is essentially selfish, contentious, quarrelsome, mean, wicked, non-altruistic, non rational, impulsive and self-centered. Machiavelli too depicts human nature in similar terms. What man desires he calls good, and pleasure is the movement in his mind that accompanies it. What he dislikes the calls evil, and the movement in his mind that accompanies it he calls pain. Good and evil, then, cannot be fixed and finite. They are not even same for all because desires of each individual are not constant but changing. Men call the succession of emotions in their minds prompting them to do or abstain from doing any thing deliberately. And when a decision is reached, men may be said to will whatever they decide upon[2].

Machiavelli has justified human nature on his way to power by pardoning the crimes committed by him[3]. In "Discourse on inequality" Rousseau contends that men in the state of nature were equal, self-sufficient and contended. But with the rise of civilization, inequality raised its head. Locke elucidates that in a state of nature men are free and equal. He does not merely mean that there was a time in the past when men were, in fact, free and equal; he means rather to assert that they ought to be free and equal without which mankind will suffer. Marx also propounds that one class exploits the other. It justifies the inherent instinct of men to dominate. All these political philosophers thus tend to agree that conflict is more natural than peace and it requires purposive action to ensure peace among individuals and communities.

Peace Education

Peace is traditionally understood as a state of no war or absence of war. John Galtung has given a clear framework of 'education for peace'. Galtung opines that peace must not only be conceived as the absence of war and direct violence (i.e., negative peace) but rather, working towards peace as the means to the realisation of conditions leading to a maximal reduction of structural violence (i.e. positive peace)[4]. At the international level the objective of peace education has attracted the attention of the international community. In 1974 UNESCO recommended that:

"Combining learning, training, information and action, international education should further the appropriate intellectual and emotional development of the individuals. It should develop a sense of social responsibility and of solidarity with the less-privileged groups and should lead to the observance of the principle of equality in everyday conduct. It should also develop qualities, aptitudes, and abilities, which would enable the individuals to acquire a critical understanding of a problem at the national and international level; to work in group; to accept and participate in free education, and to base value-judgement and decision on a national analysis of relevant facts and factors".[5]

Conflict: Environmental and External Factors

There are certain external and environmental factors, which contribute to and further exaggerate the inherent propensity of human beings for conflict. During childhood, children are influenced by the family environment and the parents may prop up certain alien groups as positive or negative role models for the child. It is not uncommon in many societies for adults to label misbehaving children with the name of a despised group. Such metaphors undoubtedly contribute to child's acquisition of culturally standardised images of the groups concerned. The

mass media, school teachers, the text books, religious teachings, personal contacts and differential exposure in the different age groups can lead to the development of such images.[6]

Coming to the classical concept of the state, it stands for a politically organized society within a given territory. One of the policies of the state to manage the conflict is through the coercive capacity of the state, ie, through police, military etc. This coercive capacity of the state is maintained by an elaborate structure of values, opinions and knowledge supporting war and violence as legitimate instruments of managing conflicts. When this coercive machinery behaves in a partisan manner and promotes one community, one faith or culture over the other(s) and actively generates animosity and hostility towards other religious sects, this prepares the grounds for intra-state, intra-societal conflicts. The recent communal flare up in Gujarat is a case in point.

Similarly at international level, unjustified territorial ambition, historical prejudices and pathological pursuit of military power by states leads inevitably to inter-state conflicts. The whole of human history is a witness to this fact.

Role Peace Education can play

Education has a major role to play in changing the mindsets of people. The education system as it obtains today seem to be lacking in incorporating some humanistic values to bring tranquility and stability in the society. The present education system has to be made peace-oriented. This will require careful revision of the contents of textbooks— especially in the field of literature and history. Conscious efforts have to be undertaken at all levels of education at primary level to avoid showing any culture or religion or ethnic group in bad light. Similarly, students have to be taught the virtues of peace. It has been noticed that during the days of Afghan Jihad, even subjects like mathematics could not stay unaffected by the zeal to propagate anti-communist hatred. The students were asked questions like: "If one mujahideen is equal to twenty Russian soldiers and how many Russian soldiers will equal ten mujahideens?". True education has to rise above partisan considerations and should consciously avoid themes that create enemy images in the impressionable young minds. Such education may be called "Peace Education", which shuns violence in all forms and spreads the messages of love and humanism.

"*Shanti*" (peace) has been a major concern of the Indian society since time immemorial. There is hardly any Hindu ritual which does not start and end with a 'Shantipath' (recitation and call for peace). Over a period of time these values have been eroded due to selfish, over-ambitious and aggressive behaviour of individuals to satisfy their unjust desires. Indian civilization, throughout history, has offered the message of peaceful co-existence, non-violence, truth and righteousness. In Jain text *Ayaramgasutta*, the non-violence is defined as:

"one may not kill, nor ill-use, nor insult, nor persecute any kind of living beings, any kind of creature, any kind of thing having a soul, any kind of beings".[7]

The fundamental law of truth and harmony in Buddha's teaching is that man should speak truth, be steadfast and worthy of confidence and should not be a hypocrite and a flatterer. One should refrain from backbiting and hearsay which is a variance of truth. Further, Buddha's teaching on 'Ethics'says:

"He must not kill living creatures, he must not take what is not given to him, he must not lie, he must not drink intoxicating liquor, he must refrain from unchastity"[8]

In the same context, kindness is accorded importance in the "*hadith*" of Prophet of Islam as "…kindness is a base of faith…."

Mahatama Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, also derived his philosophy of '*satya*(truth) and *ahimsa*(non-violence) from the fundamental principles of all religions and forged it into the anti-colonial struggle. There are plenty of examples in human history, in all religions and cultures from which the enduring message of love, tolerance and peace can be culled and this can well furnish the core of a peace curriculum.

Poverty, inequality and violence

India is the seventh largest country in the world with over hundred million people. Indian society is plagued by societal conflict of rich and poor, high caste and lower caste since time immemorial. The socio-economic conditions of poverty and inequality often become the breeding grounds for violence. In this context John Galtung defines poverty in the third world countries as indirect or structural violence. Not only poverty but political instability, lack of infra-structure, mal-development, insatiable greed of politicians and bureaucrats, and general dis-functionality of political instructions do injustice to human beings.[9] Poverty and inequality are regarded as primary reasons for criminalisation of society in the third world.[10] The highly iniquitous economic structure operating at the international level reinforces the grinding poverty of many underdeveloped and poor nations and accords reverse-legitimacy to violence, through which many think a just socio-economic order may take shape.

Federal Assertions

After independence the regional and linguistic conflicts have assumed dangerous proportions in India. The president of India, Zakir Hussain had denounced violence in his address to the Parliament on February 1968 "it is a matter of concern that there has been a recrudescence of divisive forces causing conflicts and violence either in the name of region or language or community. This is a matter for deep national concern transcending party affiliations".[11] Such a situation emerged in January, 1965 when union government decided to adopt Hindi as the language of official work and communication. There were widespread anti-Hindi demonstrations in the Southern States, particularly in Tamil Nadu. The opposition in Tamil Nadu was so intensely surcharged with emotion that within two weeks of the anti-Hindi agitation in the state, about a dozen cases of self-immolation occurred against the imposition of Hindi. West Bengal was also swayed in the same tide.[12]

The re-organisation of Indian states after independence on the linguistic basis especially Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat resulted in dissatisfaction of many people. The people of Maharashtra still desired that some more areas like Belgium, Karawar and Bidar should have been included in Maharashtra. The recently created states of Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttranchal may prove that the linguistic, regional and sub-regional feelings continue to haunt

people till date and injudicious governmental apathy towards many regional aspirations may snowball into assertive movements where the factor of violence cannot be ruled out.

Thus peace education should not only stop at the level of primary education and has to permeate through all levels of mass consciousness.

Conclusion

Conflict descends into violence through various stages— its emergence, improper means of tackling the issues relating to conflict, popular mobilisation in the name of genuine grievances, injudicious use of the coercive authority of the state and militarization of groups demanding their just shares at times through external help and unending clash between the state and armed groups and erosion of socio-political values and perpetuation of the cycle of violence. Any measure aimed at resolving conflict has thus to start with a proper diagnosis of systemic injustices and the harnessing of societal energies towards peace. What is also necessary is an appropriate transformation of the individual. And peace education at all levels can then bring harmony in the society lead us towards peace and mutual understanding.

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Endnotes

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2. Ibid., p. 51

3. Christian Gauss, *Machiavelli: The Prince*, Oxford, the Mentor Book, 1952, p.13.

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