Commentary

Peace Building in India and the World

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Peace is not an absence of war; it is a virtue, a state of mind,
a disposition for benevolence, confidence and justice.

--------------- Baruch Spinoza

There is no Peace in the world today. The Armageddon of technological disaster looms large. Religion is unable to counter the spiritual crisis raised by the biological and geological discoveries. Political thought is marked by crippling partiality. Man has turned so egocentric that he is indifferent to the survival of Humanity. One is disturbed by the human tendency to splinter the world into factions. The ending of human adventure on Earth is a possibility we have to reckon with. Faced by such a challenge our differences of race, religion, class, caste, colour, nation and ideologies become irrelevant.

The mind of a child is like a fertile, plain field and the thoughts and ideas sown therein are like seeds which have to be nurtured. These thoughts become the actions which when repeated become the behaviour of the child. The behaviour which is practised regularly develops the character of the individual.

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of Peace must be constructed.

Preamble of the constitution of the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Education is the main means of reaching out to the Human mind today and ensuring that the future of Humanity is in stable hands, so Peace Education is thought to be a philosophy and a practise. This involves developing life skills like listening, reflecting, problem solving, cooperation and conflict resolution. The process involves empowering people with skills attitudes and knowledge to have a safe world and build a sustainable environment for the future. Peace Education also seeks to

transform the Human situation by "changing social structures and patterns of thought that have created it." Peace Education has lately caught the eye of architects of the future world order and an effort is being made to teach it at many levels from Nursery through Primary School, Middle School, and Intermediate level right up to college.

One of the main aspects of Peace Education lies in Inter Religious Peace Building.

In the world as we know it today, for billions of people religion and Faith form the very core of their existence. Even if we want to one cannot walk away from TUL— which in Indian parlance means importance- Tolerance, Understanding and Learning. Religious Faith is crucial to the culture and identity of people all over the world. This plays either a positive role by encouraging peaceful co-existence among people of different faith standing together in Tolerance, Respect, Understanding for each other's Ethos. Having their own distinctive identity but co-existing happily with others of different identity, otherwise a negative role, opposing co-existence, dividing Humanity into compartments of different or no faith. What is the legacy we are going to leave for our children, the future Global Citizens?

For ensuring such a future world we need to shape education as a guiding hand which encourages faith to play a positive role in shaping values. Rescuing it from "extremist and exclusionary forces within religion - as exemplified by acts of terror perpetuated in the name of God. What is Peace Education? **Peace education is the process of acquiring the *values*, the *knowledge* and developing the *attitudes, skills, and behaviours* to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment.**

The question is **HOW to inculcate this life-skill in the world today through Peace Education?**

Examining some of the advocates of Peace education of our times. Let us first consider the research by Paulo Freire whose life was dedicated to the study of education oriented towards the world's oppressed classes. The "banking education system" or a system by which the teacher is the giver of knowledge and the student a passive receiver as defined by Friere would not work, even though in India it is still being seriously followed. What may work would be the "problem posing- education" that would make them critical thinkers....Problem posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. The teacher needs to respect the local knowledge of

the students and make them transform that to the Global perspective. Problem – posing education as advocated by Friere encourages students to be active in thinking about their world and acting, relying on dialogue and critical consciousness. A democratic teacher-student relationship needs to be developed so that co-creation of knowledge through interaction takes place and a curriculum grounded in students' interests and experience is developed not as an additional subject but a necessary life-skill.

> *Preventing conflicts is the work of Politics; establishing Peace is the work of Education"*

Maria Montessori is most typically associated with child led learning. By this she believed that human beings are natural learners and that if students , even those who were considered much younger than traditional methods advocated, were immersed in environments rich with puzzles and problems to explore, they would learn instinctively, similar to Vygotsky's theory (as cited in Van Der Veer, 1994). In her model, the Teacher facilitates the student's learning, but the student's passion and imagination are what lead, as she details in Education and Peace (1949). Her results were astounding: children thought to have significant mental challenges were successful learners. As most educators know, her methods gave birth to a movement in education which thrives globally today, with thousands of Montessori Schools. Throughout North and South America, Europe and Asia. She is however, popularly known by some as a founder of Peace Education although this is not universally accepted.

Since the early decades of the 20th century, "peace education" programs around the world have represented a spectrum of focal themes, including anti-nuclearism, international understanding, environmental responsibility, communication skills, non-violence, conflict resolution techniques, democracy, and human rights awareness, tolerance of diversity, coexistence and gender equality, among others. Some have also addressed spiritual dimensions of inner harmony, or synthesized a number of the foregoing issues into programs on world citizenship. While academic discourse on the subject has increasingly recognized the need for a broader, more holistic approach to peace education, a review of field-based projects reveals that three variations of peace education are most common: conflict resolution training, democracy education, and human rights education. New approaches are emerging and calling into question some of theoretical foundations of the models just mentioned. The most significant of these new approaches focuses on peace education as a process of worldview transformation.

Peace Education and Peace Building in Conflict Resolution-

A conflict is more than a mere disagreement, it is a situation in which people perceive, a threat-physical, emotional, power related, status related or others and these are experienced at personal, inter-personal, family, community, ethnic, state and even international level. As such it is a meaningful experience in people's lives. Conflicts are inevitable and often enriching. Participants in conflicts tend to respond on the basis of their perceptions of the situation, rather than its objective review. As such people filter their perceptions (and reactions) through their values, culture, beliefs, information, experience, gender and other variables. People want different things from the same situation. Conflict responses are both filled with ideas and feelings that can be very strong and powerful guides to our sense of possible solutions and improvement of the situation. An important need is one of analysis or the process of examination that leads to better understanding of the conflict. Conflict analysis is a practical process of examining and understanding the reality of a conflict from a variety of perspectives. This understanding forms the basis on which strategies can be developed and actions planned. It is at this point that we need to focus on a very important aspect in effective conflict resolution and that is the role of education and peace studies.

The development of peace education is a central component of peace building and provides an opportunity both to embed the core values of conflict resolution around non-violence and emancipation and to define a transformative cosmopolitan model which seeks to apply these values in peace-building. The literature on the effect of civil war on Education and the importance of education in post war peace-building is conclusive. At the World Education Forum held in 2000 in Senegal all the problems of the impact of war and humanitarian emergencies on children's education in its aftermath were discussed and unanimously there was a call for support of educational programs to address the need to promote mutual understanding, peace, tolerance and to help prevent violence. In spite of this in a study by Marc Sommers it was found that primary level children had no real hope for education in war affected areas, the boys stood a better chance of obtaining the education over the girls and the youth had no hope of any education beyond the primary level. There was a tremendous pressure or coercion to join the aggressive militias. Sommers conclusion makes a powerful statement for a major investment in education as a necessary component of post –conflict peace building. Trends show that the provision for the development of education and educational resources is increasingly a component of peace agreements. Four main themes emerge in these agreements, respecting and implementing the right to education, resuming education services, responding

to conflict creating issues within the education sector and actively reforming the education system as a way to address the issues generating conflict.

Peace education defined in this way carries within it the core values of resistance to war and violence. Peace education and peace building in conflict resolution is a complex and multi level process involving a diversity of actors, professional expertise. The need of the hour is to introduce understanding and development of the life-skills necessary, within the education system and strive to make it a part of basic education empowering the future generations and preparing them for transformative conflict resolution.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Moving closer to a peaceful global community, Peace education programs centred on raising awareness of human rights typically focus at the level of policies that humanity ought to adopt. There should be a commitment among participants to a vision of structural peace in which all individual members of the human race can exercise their personal freedoms and be legally protected from violence, oppression and indignity

Participants should be familiar with the international covenants and declarations of the United Nations system; train students to recognize violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and promote tolerance, solidarity, autonomy and self-affirmation at the individual and collective levels. At a young age students, whether in formal or non-formal education should be made aware of their rights. This is a debatable point as in many instances it was seen that becoming aware of ones right too leads to a conflict situation.

In one practitioner's view:

> *"Human rights education does not work in communities fraught with conflict unless it is part of a comprehensive approach… In fact, such education can be counterproductive and lead to greater conflict if people become aware of rights which are not realized. In this respect, human rights education can increase the potential for conflict"*

To prevent these outcomes, many such programs are now being combined with aspects of conflict resolution and democracy education schools of thought, along with training in non-violent action.

World View Transformation

According to Prof. Priyankar Upadhyaya, citing the example of the city of Varanasi and studying the Ganga-Jamuni tahzeeb or the harmonious co-existence of two major, diverse, religious communities, the Hindus and the Muslims. Though disturbed intermittently by minor differences, but mostly contributing to a peaceful coexistence in the form of economic interdependency, sharing the joys and sorrows, celebrating each other's festivals. Existense of sites of common worship, Masjid and Temple in close proximity, with peoples' police to ward off any problems. Among the children too one can see children of different religions, regions, community attending the same school, coaching, going on picnics or spending weekends at the Mall.

But the question is if this is sufficient to ensure a society free from riots, clashes, hatred, intolerance and peacefully co-exist? Experts from all over the world believe that **education is the key** to such a peaceful co-existence, where there will be no hate, terror and disharmony but society itself would transform and inter-religious peace building take place as an outcome of this transformation.

Peace education includes proven practical traditional methods and new innovative modern programs which address the rapidly changing situation in the world. Transformation through peace education is both possible and vital for global peace. Without this initiative we will not learn from our violent history and repeat the mistakes of the past which will ultimately lead to our own destruction. It is imperative to seek ways of transforming military training and peace education for aligning with the ultimate goal of world peace.

To sum up, the seeds of non-violence, peace-building, harmony and compassion for fellow humans need to be sown in the ever growing impressionable mind of Humanity so that the negative-feelings are not nurtured in the world of tomorrow. Eventually this peace movement through education will rid the world of terrorism in all its forms and go to build a world order with lasting peace. What seems a utopian idea can be a reality realised through Peace Education.