

# Exploring a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World

## September 11 and its Aftermath

As I stand here to present my paper which aims at exploring a culture of peace and nonviolence for the children of the world my mind inevitably goes to the most heinous and ghastly crime of human civilization committed on September 11, 2001 when more than 3,000 innocent people working in the twin towers of the World Trade Centre lost their lives as a result of the terrorist strike against them. The whole world watched in horror as the giant towers collapsed in no time. In their place was now the heap of debris and mutilated human bodies strewn all along. One despicable aspect of this catastrophe was that those who did it embraced death willingly and joyfully. It is beyond doubt that they were trained in a culture of hatred and violence - a culture that sought to extirpate and destroy the groups who didn't belong to their faith and who thought differently. This horrible trend still seems to dominate the world and a large number of children of the world are being exposed to this culture of violence ironically enough in the name of religion.

The events that followed the tragedy of September 11 were still more shocking and disastrous. A worldwide coalition against terrorism was formed under the leadership of USA which with their unprecedented military might invaded the citadel of terrorism at that time i.e. Afghanistan. Thousands of innocent people who had nothing to do with September 11 tragedy were killed. In military language this loss of lives is called 'collateral Damage' - a damage less important as compared with the cause i.e. extirpation of terrorism. The question that arises before us is: has the objective been achieved? No one quite knows what fate has befallen Osama Bin Laden - the architect of terrorism. The whereabouts of his aides including the enigmatic Mullah Omar are still shrouded in mystery. Equally intriguing is the size and extent of the terrorist networks which are still operating clandestinely. The dread of Al Qaeda continues to haunt the most redoubtable political and military leaders across the planet. Fanatics still continue to chase their fanatasies in the shape of Jihad. A sense of insecurity prevails and the world seems to believe Hutington's portrayal of violence in different parts of the world as '*a clash of civilizations*'.

We are passing through one of the most violent periods of modern history. 9/11 catastrophe makes it imperative for us to think beyond wars and adopt ahimsa (nonviolence) as a means of putting an end to terrorism since no amount of military might can defeat it unless we first address the issues that cause it. We can kill or disarm the enemy but unless the cause of enmity is rooted out, the cycle of revenge will go on for centuries making innocent people vulnerable in the form of 'collateral damage'. Their agonized lament will continue to fall on deaf ears.

Today we face the most dangerous collective madness in the threat of annihilation by the followers of a particular race or a religious group or even by a superpower and its

allies. We see that peacelessness, hatred and especially collective hatred, with its explosions of enmity and violence, are manifestations of the causes of grave deviations, anomalies, folly and many other sicknesses. One of the cause of violence is our failure to understand the actual cultural diversity and our refusal to use our resources equally to mitigate the hardship of each of the religiously and culturally diverse societies within a state. Injustice, exploitation, discrimination, uncontrolled greed, consumerism, and arrogance provide the religious zealots with a tool to lure the youths to a cult of hatred.

### **The Meaning of a Culture of Peace**

The question that arises is whether violence and oppression have been minimized or controlled after the two US-led wars against terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq. Forces of violence and hatred led by Al Qaeda are still able to strike at their will in any part of the world. Apart from the streams of blood flowing through the streets of Baghdad and many parts of Afghanistan every day we realize that they have struck terror in London. Underground and in the local trains of Mumbai. The problem becomes more complex when the people begin to support them. Another important thing is that the routes of money that flow to terrorists and sustain their activities have not been sealed. We need to initiate a global campaign to educate young and old in a culture of ahimsa so that forces of violence can be defeated.

Let us now turn to the question as to what we mean by a culture of peace. As defined by the United Nations the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations. In essence we can say that the quest for a culture of peace and nonviolence is a journey within, a journey into the self. It is an enlightened state of inner awakening which one can attain only by mastering one's desires and emotions.

Is there no other way to prevent such acts of barbarism and savagery? Is there no alternative to violence? The answer is 'yes' provided we can learn the art of forgiving and are able to listen to our inner voice. Tolerance has in it the power to reverse the devastating trend. What is most distressing is that religious intolerance is on the increase and fanaticism is percolating through the minds of youths and children. It is time we took concrete steps to stop the march of the forces of violence and vandalism. The person most concerned about this catastrophic situation today is Acharya Mahapragya, head of a Jain sect and a nonviolent crusader for peace and nonviolence. His Anuvrat Movement aims at transforming the individual by seeking his commitment to basic vows forbidding killing, exploitation, discrimination and acquisitiveness.

Having led Ahimsa Yatra for five years to rid society of violence Acharya Mahapragya is convinced that training in nonviolence alone can curb and prevent violence from the face of this earth. Let us listen to what he says:

*'The use of the power of weapons is not possible for a coward, similarly the valiant whose minds are filled with delusion, desires for*

*acquisitiveness and hatred will find it impossible to use the power of ahimsa. Every one can make ordinary use of the power of ahimsa but only those can be expected to make its extraordinary use whose love has vanquished hatred and in whose view man is mere man, free from caste and communal bondages. The power of ahimsa doesn't have different levels but the power of its use has many levels. How can each level be expected to give the same result? Thus every one is not aware of the methodology of the use of ahimsa. If we have the competence and methodology of its use, the power of violence cannot succeed in the face of the power of ahimsa.'*

## **Roots of Violence**

I do not subscribe to the view the present phenomenon of violence in the world today is a symptom of a clash of civilizations. It is absolutely clear that no amount of military might can extirpate terrorism root and branch. The military might can silence guns for a limited period and the monster can raise its head again with greater vengeance and ferocity. We can kill or disarm the enemy but unless the cause of enmity is rooted out the cycle of revenge will go on for hundreds of years making innocent people vulnerable in the form of 'collateral damage'. We have to go deeper into the roots of violence or terrorism. An eminent peace researcher of the modern world Johan Galtung says that *'there is something ecological to peace. Nature's balance is rooted in diversity (of biota and abiota) and symbiosis between the components of an ecosystem. I would say that peace is also rooted in diversity meaning the functional interdependence not only of diverse 'actors' like countries but also of municipalities, international organizations, transnational corporations and so on, not to mention non-human life and non-living resources'* Harmony among the diverse components of the ecosystem - be they humans or other forms of life - depends on three principles: diversity, symbiosis and equity. Even true love lies embedded in these very components of a sustainable culture. Lord Mahavira, a contemporary of Lord Buddha, known as the 24th Tirthankar of the nonviolent Jain tradition, made an ecologically significant statement 2,600 years ago in the aphorism *'Parasparopgraho jivanam'* (All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence) which is refreshingly contemporary in its premise and perspective. It defines the scope of modern ecology and extends it further to the fact that not only human beings but also animals, birds, plants, and even microbes belong together and are bound in a physical as well a metaphysical relationship. Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance in a universe teeming with independent constituents. Mahavira proclaimed a profound truth for all times to come when he said:

*'one who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them.'*

Violence is inevitable if any of these three principles of our co-existence is violated i.e. diversity, symbiosis and equity. The crisis that faces mankind today owes its origin to our desire to hoard, exploit, dominate and acquire wealth. Everyone seems to be in the race for being the richest person on the earth. If nations, individuals and groups

realize that our survival depends on the preservation of this diversity, cooperation and equitable distribution of human resources, there will never be the replay of September 11, fears of which continue to lurk in the hearts of not only the people of America but the people of the entire world. This makes it necessary for us to know the causes that generate hatred and terrorism. It is the unbridled human greed which is at the root of all conflicts. Let me explain the three principles that I have alluded to in the preceding pages.

Diversity is the innate, inbuilt nature of our ecosystem which sustains life on this planet. Democracy is based on the assumption that we become strong together precisely when we are diverse (often called 'pluralistic' in this context). If one thinks that there should be only one religion or one culture in the entire world, it is like saying that there should be only one cloth shop or one departmental store in the whole world. Is it practical? Those who are talking of just one culture or one religion of their choice are sowing the seeds of intolerance and hatred towards other cultural and religious groups. A way of thinking cannot be curbed by military might. We have to make the people realize that by advocating this dangerous doctrine we are as a matter of fact jeopardizing our own existence. Just as we need horses, elephants, lions, tigers, cows, buffalos, goats, trees, plants, vegetation and different dishes of food, we need to see a motley crowd wearing different dresses, speaking different languages and practicing different religions. Diversity is a source of breathtaking beauty and it is in our interest. It is the basic ingredient of a culture of peace and nonviolence. We have to build peace like nature builds a mature ecosystem. We are faced with a paradox. Our very cooperative and social nature, which provides the impetus for civilization, can also lead to war through a deep-rooted distortion of our society and thus of our nature.

The second principle of a culture of peace and nonviolence is symbiosis-cooperation. It is not through a cultural or religious clash but through cooperation with one another that we can survive. The birth of United Nations is the vindication of the principle of cooperation. The Jain ecology lays tremendous emphasis on interdependence and togetherness. All other major religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism are agreed that cooperation and not confrontation can ensure a peaceful existence. The most important of the three principles elucidated above is equity. Equal rights whether they relate to health, wealth, education and employment are the key to universal peace. We have now to ponder whether we have been just to the people around us and whether we have refrained from unethical practices to grab resources at the cost of the poor. When the prerequisites for sustainable peace are not fulfilled, a society is unstable and prone to violence - either civil conflict or external wars. These underlying causes are aggravated by establishment control of the way in which we view the outsiders and by our tendency to blame the external agency for the problems that beset our own society. Broadly speaking we can say that the roots of war or violence may lie in the following conditions:

- (i) lack of consensus,
- (ii) unsustainable ecology,
- (iii) injustice,

- (iv) poverty,
- (v) distorted consensus,
- (vi) distorted human nature,
- (vii) militarism
- (viii) political elite

A science without humanity, without responsibility will destroy all of us. Let us recall the wise words of Bertrand Russel - words that have yet to find their way into military and nuclear research centers, into the meeting rooms of the two major military alliances, into hearts and minds of military officials:

*"We have to learn to think in a new way. Remember your humanity and forget the rest. If you can do that, the way lies open to a new paradisse: if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death."*

It will be in fitness of things if the politicians and citizens of today can take note of what the most celebrated historian Arnold Toynbee said,

*'In order to save Mankind we have to learn to live together in concord in spite of traditional differences of religion, civilization, nationality, class, and race. In order to live together in concord successfully, we have to know each other, and knowing each other includes knowing each other's past, since human life, like the rest of the phenomenal Universe, can be observed by human minds only as it presents itself to them on the move through time. Historical forces can be more explosive than atom bombs. For our now urgent common purpose of self-preservation it will not be enough to explore our common underlying human nature. The psychologist's work needs to be supplemented by the archaeologist's, the historian's, the anthropologist's, and the sociologist's. We must learn to recognize and, as far as possible, to understand, the different cultural configurations in which our common human nature has expressed itself in the different religions, civilizations, and nationalities into which human culture has come to be articulated in the course of its history.'*

### **A Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World**

After having analyzed the tragedy of September 11 and its aftermath and after having dealt with the roots of war and terrorism I now come to an important question: how can the world be rid of war and violence? The devastation of September 11 captured the world's attention but we cannot lose sight of the near-epidemic levels of other forms of war which I have enumerated as the causes of war in the second part of my presentation i.e. the violence of injustice, structural, institutional, religious, ethnic and cultural violence, violence in the widening gaps that divide the world in terms of wealth, health and knowledge and violence due to poverty. The only way to put an end to violence permanently is to address the issues that cause violence and concentrate our energies on the education of children across the world who will be the future citizens of

this world. The only way to counter violence is to educate and train the young generation in the culture of peace and nonviolence that Lord Mahavira, Lord Buddha, Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. have spoken of at length. Many of you might have read the Seville Statement on Violence written by an international team of specialists in 1986 for UN sponsored International Year of Peace and its follow up. The Statement was based on the latest scientific evidence. It says, "*just as 'wars begin in the minds of men', peace also begins in our minds. The same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace. The responsibility lies with each of us.*" Mahatma Gandhi who experimented with children at Tostoy Farm in South Africa long ago made some important observations as regards the eternal values underlying education. Let us first examine what he said:

*But I had always given the first place to the culture of the heart or the building of character, and as I felt confident that moral training could be given to all alike, no matter how different their ages and their upbringing, I decided to live amongst them all the twenty-four hours of the day as their father. I regarded character building as the proper foundation for their education and, if the foundation was firmly laid, I was sure that the children could learn all the other things themselves or with the assistance of friends.*

Elucidating the concept, he further said:

*Long before I undertook the education of the youngsters of the Tolstoy Farm I had realized that the training of the spirit was a thing by itself. To develop the spirit is to build character and to enable one to work towards a knowledge of God and self-realization. And I held that this was an essential part of the training of the young, and that all training without culture of the spirit was of no use, and might be even harmful.*

Acharya Mahapragya has evolved two extremely significant techniques for strengthening the culture of peace and nonviolence. He is of the view that a new dimension is needed to be added to the present system of education which stresses only intellectual development and neglects the emotional development altogether. It is this neglect that is mainly responsible for the dominance of a culture of violence and hatred in the world. If a provision for the education and training of controlling emotions is included in the current system of education, it will mean a radical change in the social and political environment. It will be more conducive to the growth of ahimsa. Acharya Mahapragya's Science of Living and Preksha Meditation have in them the potential to fill this gap.

The main concept of Science of Living is that the systems of education prevalent in all countries of the world should be properly balanced. It means that just as efforts are being made for physical and intellectual development the same efforts should be made for a child's mental and emotional development. If it happens, the systems of education followed in different countries may be described as balanced. In order to have the

equilibrium we have to achieve the *pranic* balance or the balance of the vital force, biological balance, awakening of faith in the competence and purification of outlook, behaviour and emotions. It will result in the four dimensions – physical development, intellectual development, mental development and emotional development. These factors constitute Science of Living as propounded by Acharya Mahapragya. Another significant contribution of Acharya Mahapragya is the gift of Preksha Meditation to humankind. It is a technique to see within, to acquire inner insight and to attain spiritual height. ‘Without spirituality’ says Acharya Mahapragya, human callousness and his instinct for violence cannot be eradicated. He further says that virtue can’t be taught. It sprouts naturally in children when they are exposed to a congenial environment rooted in moral and spiritual values. There are some psychic centres associated with the growth of moral and spiritual development of a human being which need to be activated. The Science of Yoga, Preksha Meditation and Science of Living can bring about a complete transformation and behavioural modification by activating these psychic centres present in our physical system.

### **UN Resolution**

Realizing the gravity of the situation, Nobel Peace Laureates signed an appeal for the children of the world in 1997 and called for an international decade for peace. The United Nations heeded the appeal and the General Assembly declared the years 2001-2010 as the **International Decade for a Cultural of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World.**

To begin with the Nobel Peace Laureates composed a six-point commitment:

- Respect all life
- Reject violence
- Share with others
- Listen to understand
- Preserve the planet
- Rediscover solidarity

This commitment has in it all the components of 'the culture of the heart' as envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi at Tostoy Farm in South Africa.

### **ANUVIBHA's Efforts**

Anuvibha has been in the forefront of a worldwide campaign to popularize the culture of ahimsa since 1988 when it organized the first ICPNA (International Conference on Peace and Nonviolent Action) at Ladnun, India, under the spiritual patronage of the two most revered Jain saints Acharya Tulsi and Acharya Mahapragya. As a follow up action to the recommendations made in the Ladnun Declaration it organized the Second ICPNA on *Evolving a Viable System to Train and Orient People in*

*Nonviolence* at Rajsamand in 1991 which was attended by more than 100 overseas delegates besides 100 eminent nonviolence practitioners of India. It will be worthwhile to reproduce excerpts from the Declaration:

### **The Meaning of Nonviolence**

*The Second ICPNA is a humble attempt to build a structure of peace and nonviolence. However, peace is not merely the absence of war nor nonviolence only abstinence from physical violence. It is a holistic and positive concept encompassing all manifestations of life and society on the Earth. It includes both structural peace and ecological balance. Nonviolence implies active and dynamic love, respect and reverence for all living beings that inhabit this planet, attributes of equality, human dignity, poise, harmony and resistance to tyranny and injustice.*

### **Need of Training in Nonviolence**

*For the past many years, humankind has evolved and invented numerous methods of training in violence and war. We have been spending enormous material and human resources on them at the cost of mass hunger, illiteracy and environmental damage. Besides, violence has been growing menacingly in different forms. The complexity of the situation that the world faces today makes it mandatory for us to move further from the principle of peaceful co-existence towards a more active principle of cooperation for peace and develop the requisite instruments for such cooperation. Hence, training in nonviolence is imperative in modern times. If we fail to evolve a viable scientific system to train and orient people in ahimsa, we shall be failing in our most important duty towards humanity and society.*

### **Content of the Training in Nonviolence**

*To train people in nonviolence, we must combine the aspects of both individual and community growth and build an integrated personality with appropriate training of hand, head and heart which will facilitate the structural and functional excellence of social development. The objective of this training is to enable all people to gain an insightful understanding of nonviolence and peace and the spiritual values on which they rest, equip them with skills for individual and mass nonviolent action, prepare them for democratic leadership in conflict resolution through nonviolence and help them develop positive attitudes for harmonious living.*

### **Strategies, tools and Organization of Training in Nonviolence**

*We seek participation of concerned young people from all over the world. Training in nonviolence has both its individual and social*



*dimensions. It should employ such methods as meditation to bring about a change of heart and attitude in the individuals, persuasion, personal example, willingness to suffer rather than injure another, moral uprightness, practice of sharing one's resources with the other, faith in the essential goodness of all humans and regard for the basic human rights of all. The other tools of training may include regular classes, lectures, self-study, workshops, panel discussions, community living, games and sanitation. Training should encourage constructive programmes and social service. It should also take special care of developing the ability among the trainees to understand the pulse of the people, public opinion, training in communications and in audio visual programmes. Equally essential is the training in the organization and leadership of nonviolent action. It involves investigation of the problem, the organization and leadership of nonviolent action, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration and other norms of conflict resolution such as mobilization of opinion, planning, preparation, use of different forms of nonviolent direct action including non-cooperation, civil disobedience and fasting etc.*

### **The Global Role of Education in Peace and Nonviolence**

*Education is the most important instrument of training in nonviolence because it shapes and moulds the human mind. Training in nonviolence and peace should be introduced in education both at the formal and informal levels to bring about an attitudinal transformation.*

### **Recommendations**

*We make the following recommendations and declare that their adoption by the institution and individuals of the world will pave the way for a peaceful and nonviolent world order:*

1. *UNESCO, National Governments and Voluntary Organizations working in the field of education as well as in the other areas of human welfare should evolve a programme to introduce global peace education and training in nonviolence both at the formal and informal levels of education.*
2. *We the delegates to the second ICPNA who have helped in the formulation of this Declaration take upon us and recommend that all non-governmental organizations should endeavour to create awareness of the importance of nonviolence at all social levels in order that there might be a strong public opinion against expenditure on armaments and war, leading to a political determination to gradually abolish the institutions of war and in their place establish institutions of peace.*

## Conclusion

In continuation to its efforts to train young people in the culture of nonviolence and as a follow up of the UN resolution declaring 2001-2010 as a decade of a culture of peace and nonviolence for the children of the world, Anuvibha organized the Fifth ICPNA (International Conference on Peace and Nonviolent Action) dedicated to the theme '*Seeking the True Meaning of the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World*' at the Peace Palace Rajsamand near Udaipur (Rajasthan) from 23rd February to 28th February 2003. It was a constructive endeavour to explore a culture of peace and nonviolence. It is a matter of great joy for Anuvrat workers that UNESCO has recognized His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya's contribution and designated Anuvibha as a global actor for a culture of peace and nonviolence for the children of the world. The quest is continuing under the spiritual patronage and guidance of His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya and his group of ascetics. The campaign gained momentum when Acharya Mahapragya embarked on his Ahimsa Yatra, the first phase of which has just been concluded. Anuvibha is trying to chronicle the miraculous achievements that resulted from training young people in nonviolence during his yatra. His Ahimsa Yatra is in fact an endeavour to explore this ocean.