

IS UNIVERSAL PEACE POSSIBLE?

A JAINA RESPONSE TO ITS DEEPER ASPECTS

– *Dr. Sohan Lal Gandhi*

The Backdrop and Analysis of the Current Tension

On October 02 the world celebrated the International Day of Nonviolence in honour of Mahatma Gandhi, an apostle of ahimsa who used nonviolence as a powerful weapon to defeat the forces of violence represented by imperialism. Appalled by the rising tide of a culture of violence and hatred, on June 15, 2007 the member states of the United Nations unanimously voted to establish October 02 as the International Day of Nonviolence and commemorate it every year for the dissemination of the message of nonviolence worldwide. Only a few days back we also commemorated the International Day of Peace on Sept 21 and International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on Sept 26. The main objective of the celebration of these three days in a year declared by UN as extremely significant is to create a universal awareness of peace, make the world realize that nuclear weapons are a great threat to our existence and the only means to achieve global peace is nonviolence. But I wonder if the children and youths of the schools and colleges across the world even know about these days, not to speak of their significance for the world. The media does highlight them prominently only when these days appear in a year. However, the lacklustre way in which these days are observed and the ritual of celebration is performed shows how serious the Govt. agencies and people are about the cause of peace.

Peace is the basis of our life and survival. Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara of the nonviolent Jain tradition who lived nonviolence in thought, word and deed said – *je ya buddha anna gaya santi tesim paitthanam bhuyunam jagai jaha* – "*The basis or support of all the Buddhas (Tirthankaras) who had come into the world and those who will appear in the future is peace just as Prithvi (the earth) is the support or basis of all jivas.*" No *jiva* can live without peace. In reality, it is the elixir that sustains all of us. Every one today talks of peace but it continues to elude

nations, families and individuals at global level. Today, the truth is that every one of us including our families and the nations of this world are torn apart by strife. The whole world appears to be a seething cauldron of violence and peacelessness. Keeping in mind these three important days which remind us of peace, elimination of nuclear weapons and nonviolence and keep us hooked with this noble thought continuously for 12 days from 21st Sept to 02 Oct, I endeavour to answer the question whether universal peace is possible from a Jaina perspective.

As I sit to write on the possibility of creating a nonviolent and peaceful world I feel that the people of India are in the mood of a triumphalist and euphoric celebration of their supremacy after their army carried out surgical strikes inside the territory of Pakistan and destroyed the seven launching pads of the terrorists in retaliation against the fatal attack at an army post at Uri in the early hours of Sept 17, 2016 which resulted in the death of our 18 brave soldiers. The surgical strikes by the army were the culmination of this mood of anger and indignation that gripped the country after the Uri attack. However, the irony is that Pakistan vehemently refutes the Indian claim of such strikes. Unfortunately Pak continues to be the hub of terrorism despite the global clamour for its eradication.

But as a Jain I would say that the inimical and highly charged emotions of the peoples of the two countries are taking the form of a frenzy and even if the two sides assert that their anger is righteous, in my view this animosity reflected in their inflammatory speeches and harsh words is generating tons of inauspicious karmas particularly the four destructive or *ghati karmas* (i) *jnanavarniya* (knowledge covering) ; (ii) *darshnavarniya* (intuition covering) ; (iii) *mohaniya* (deluding) and (iv) *antaraya* (obstructive *karmas*) which are likely to cost them heavily in the life hereafter causing their souls long-term worldly wanderings. Earlier too I felt uncomfortable at the deafening sound of war cries across the country, the land of Buddha, Mahavira and Gandhi who taught us that violence in any form is a sin which must be avoided at any cost. This clamour for war against

Pakistan in the wake of the terrorist strike at an army post of Uri (J & K) in the early hours of Sept 17 was much louder in Social Media. Most people in India wanted to teach Pakistan a lesson. What type of lesson? Can a war be a lesson for a country? If it were so India has already fought four wars with Pak. The 1971 war had almost crippled it but did it learn any lesson from it? It is so easy for warmongers to shout 'war' since none of them is going to fight and shed his or her blood in any war. Human tendency is to exult in a thing at someone else's cost. What do these 'warriors' of social media lose if a war is fought between India and Pakistan? Only the innocent people of the villages living near Indo-Pak border will suffer the most. I also saw another moving and pathetic spectacle of the grieving families of the martyrs at TV channels. I wonder if those who want India to fight a horrible, possibly a nuclear war against Pak, saw the widows, children and elderly members of the families of these martyrs wailing, weeping and lamenting. Do they have any idea as to how many families are likely to wail and weep if war actually takes place.

Is Peace Possible in an Inimical Environment ?

The question that arises is whether peace is possible in such biased and prejudiced environment. India was partitioned in the name of religion and the two countries (India and Pakistan) are pitted against each other as sworn enemies. Pak is an Islamic country and the Muslim youths there are being radicalized. In India too there is no dearth of people gripped by xenophobia. It is true India is a victim of the proxy war let loose by the Pak army in the form of terrorist groups who have been striking at our people and soldiers stealthily and who have killed a large number of innocent civilians. But Pak is always in a denial mode. It rather says that it itself is a victim of terror. On the other hand, the panelists at Pak TV channels are heard vomiting venom at India and Indian political leaders. They seem proud of their nuclear arsenal and want their leaders to use them to silence their big brother forever. Is there any limit to animosity and vengeance? I do hear some sane voices in between but they are drowned in the awful din raised by warmongers on

their either side. What makes me sad is that these people who have been ventilating their anger at the debates in various TV channels or have been shouting war cries while leading procession in various cities are highly educated people who are aware of the dreadful consequences of a war. Whosoever is the first to start a war is not only condemned by United Nations but the invading country is punished with a lot of economic sanctions which are certain to result in a huge unemployment problem. The countries which are now sympathetic towards us are likely to turn against us. The Hindu radical groups and Islamic Jihadis are sparing no effort to widen the deep divide that already exists between the Hindus and Muslims in India and between India and Pakistan. The only way to resolve a conflict is dialogue. Let us hope it dawns on the political leaders of the two countries that the war will cause destruction beyond imagination and both the victor and the vanquished will be ravaged.

No religion of the world supports war. All religions condemn it and emphasize the war with the self. Lord Mahavira says : "*jo sahasam sahasaanam, sangama dujjae jine. Egam jinejja appanam, esa se, parma, jao.* A person who conquers the self is greater and braver than the one who conquers a million enemies." We hear a similar echo in the Bible in which Jesus says that "*he who taketh his spirit is greater than he who taketh a city.*" Islamic Jihad is Jihad against injustice, evils and as a matter of fact *jihad* is always with the self to conquer our evil tendencies but the terrorists are misinterpreting it. All enlightened souls exhort us to battle with the self, battle against evil tendencies within us which are the real source of war.

The history of unrest, conflict and war dates back to thousands of years. It is estimated that more than 6000 wars have been fought on this planet since the advent of humanity. This record of wars includes only the wars fought in battlefields as well as the First World War and the Second World War in which most of the nations took part as allies or enemies but innumerable small and bloody conflicts which were fought among families and neighbours have never

been chronicled. Millions died to satiate the lust for power of these unknown despots and dictators.

Answering the question whether a nonkilling society is possible, Prof. Glenn D. Paige author of the bestselling book *Nonkilling Global Political Science* and a nonviolent crusader against killing in any form says, *"Amidst global killing and threats to kill at the violent end of the violent twentieth century, there are understandably ample grounds for political scientists and their students to conclude – It's completely unthinkable ! But there are also signs of willingness to give the question serious consideration – It's thinkable and maybe it's possible. Moreover despite unprecedented threats to human survival there are countervailing global resources of spirit, science, institutions, and experience to strengthen confidence that ultimately – It's completely possible."*

The Global Scenario

The situation at global level is also not very favourable. Localized conflicts in several parts of the world are taking a heavy toll of innocent lives. After 9/11 America launched a full scale war in Iraq and Afghanistan to liberate them from terrorism. Could this war in which thousands of soldiers and civilians lost their lives, solve the problem? No, rather the situation has become worse. One third of the territory of Iraq is now occupied by ISIS - the most dreadful terrorist outfit. The countries which are perpetually conflict-ridden are Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Columbia and the middle east. No country is free from internal violence. Even a small rogue country like North Korea is threatening the super power America with dire consequences. Can America finish North Korea? Today, the world is regulated by international laws.

The greatest danger that the world faces today is that of religious terrorism. The cult of suicide bombing by fidayeens is percolating through various social groups, particularly through Islamic fundamentalists. The advent of political Islam with its roots in religion is attracting a large number of misguided Muslim youths who are vying with one another to be suicide bombers and fidayeens. I wonder what makes

them die willingly and in some extreme cases joyfully while carrying out such attacks. I have noticed that those who indoctrinate them with the lure of being blessed with heaven after death are living luxurious lives, they never stake their own lives. With the invention of internet which connects such groups instantaneously across the world and which provide them with platforms like Twitter, Facebook, What's App and a host of other facilities for the dissemination of their Jingoistic and xenophobic literature, a culture of violence seems to be closing in on humanity. This invisible current is sweeping the world. The word 'Islam' stands for peace and its tenets also make it crystal clear that killing is the greatest sin. It is the duty of the genuine Islamic religious leaders to counter the propaganda of the Islamic fanatics who are stigmatizing a great religion. The passive and indifferent attitude of the general Muslim Community towards these Islamic fanatics is deplorable. If this vicious fanaticism is not countered, I fear a catastrophe much bigger than that of the Holocaust or the nuclear catastrophe of Hiroshima might happen soon.

In addition to the religious fanaticism that engulfs the world and poses a serious threat to humanity today what worries us most is that the world is awash in weapons. According to the United Nations there about 900 million or more small arms are in circulation. At the beginning of 2016 nuclear weapon states were in possession of about 25000 nuclear warheads, more than 8500 of which are operational and several thousand of which are kept on high alert, ready to be launched within minutes. Seventy-three countries of the world continue to stockpile billions of cluster bombs or munitions which have been used in Iraq, Lebanon and Georgia in recent years. More than 2500 children have been exploited as soldiers and hundreds of thousands of women have been raped in conflict situations. The threat of nuclear war is not ruled out. There is a possibility of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, particularly Islamic terrorists and even the very thought of it makes us shudder.

Futility of Arms : Inner Peace Alone Can Save Us

I am of the view that neither United Nations nor countries equipped with nuclear arms or weapons of mass destruction can tackle this menace. Thousands of young educated people across the world are already in the clutches this cult of hatred. The problem is compounded when political ambitions of certain groups or the people who are dissatisfied with their Governments are mixed with religious fanaticism. It is abundantly clear that wars can never solve any problem. They not only cause untold suffering to humanity but also deprive it of its basic means of sustenance. The present arms race produces no security but maximum insecurity. We know that any large number of nuclear explosions will bring nuclear winter, the withering of plant life, animal life, human life over at least half the globe. If there is peace, there is prosperity, the hungry can be fed, the sick can be healed, water can be brought to the thirsty, the light of education can be offered to those who sit in darkness. Enormous amount of money is being spent on arms worldwide. It is enough to wipe poverty, unemployment, diseases from the planet. There is another dimension of this materialistic progress. Happiness is gradually vanishing from our lives. With the rise of the level of our standard of living, society is increasingly dominated by evil propensities like envy, greed, rivalry, fear, vengeance and egotism. Individuals are more tense than ever before. They have all the comforts at their disposal but happiness eludes them. We have to fight a two pronged battle to free the world from external violence and help individuals to overcome their chaos within. Unless an individual is at peace with himself, there can be no peace in society and the world.

Spiritual Development - A Must for Peace and Ecological Balance

The other question before us is how a nonviolent and peaceful world can be created. To my mind the only antidote to the state of peacelessness is spirituality. It will be useful to listen to the voice of one of the self-illuminated saints, a renowned spiritual thinker and an eminent Jain preceptor Acharya Mahapragya who says, "*I believe that a person's spiritual development is absolutely necessary along with his*

material development. Let us all assert resolutely that peace is impossible without spirituality."

Man's spiritual development is not commensurate with the scientific and technological advancement that has taken place on this planet. The last two centuries of human history are marked by unprecedented material progress in every sphere of life. Man has conquered nature to a large extent. Today he rules the roost in the sky, the seas and on the earth but his greed to possess more and more continues to burgeon. As a result an unprecedented ecological and environmental crisis has been created. In the words of the celebrated scientist James Lovelock *'The earth is critically ill.'* Most of the species vitally important for our survival have disappeared. Mountains are benuded. Rivers are drying up. Forests have shrunk at a terrible level. Drinking water has become a scarce commodity. Frequent famines, droughts, floods, tsunamis in all parts of the world are adding to our misery every day. Climate change seems to threaten our survival into the third millennium. In less than two hundred years all natural resources have depleted and very little is left for the coming generation. It is a man made disaster that owes its origin to our unrestrained activities and wantonness. We have become self-centred. There is a marked decadence of moral and spiritual values in our life. The situation can be reversed only if we cultivate self-discipline and self-control, the two hallmarks of spirituality. Spirituality manifests itself only when the four major passions i.e. anger, pride, deceit and greed subside. Spirituality means the rise of intrinsic traits like ahimsa, non-possessiveness, truth, non-stealing and continence. The main basis of spirituality is ahimsa and the other tenets such as truth, non-stealing, non-possessiveness and continence are complementary. They strengthen the vow of ahimsa.

The Jaina Path of Peace

Jainism says that it is man's instinctual tendency for possessiveness that is responsible for all small and big conflicts that we see today. It is the basic source of violence and hatred in this world. With the increase in materialistic prosperity

man has lost touch with the self. All his actions are riveted on the external world. The more he is mired in the mud of this mundane world, the more he is removed away from the soul which is the source of happiness. He may have conquered the space, the seas and the earth but unless he conquers the self all his victories in the world are vain and useless.

According to Jainism every person indulges in three kinds of activities which generate the *karmic* dust. There are the activities of his or her body, speech and mind. It is his or her mind which plays a pivotal role. Every action of a human being passes through three stages. First it occurs in his mind. Then he expresses it in words and finally his body carries it out. While taking a vow a Jain says, "*I will abstain from all sinful activities in thought, word and deed.*" The origin of every human action is his mind.

Jainism emphasizes the purity of mind. If a person's mind is pure, the word that comes out of his mouth and the actions that his body performs will also be pure. Jainism is of the view that the human mind is the source of both peace and hatred. Evil propensities generate layers of inauspicious *karmas* which camouflage the soul and eclipse its true nature. In such tainted state it propels the individual to behave wantonly. This contaminated state of one's soul can be purified only by restraining the evil propensities of one's mind. The Jains hold that self-restraint alone is life. It is our thoughts, urges, emotions that generate good or bad *karmas* incessantly. So the way to peace lies in their restraint, in their suppression. Human emotion is at the root of good or bad actions that we see in the world. Let us take an example of a man who feels jealous of a person standing before him but outwardly he treats him as a friend. Deep in his heart he harbours ill-will and conspires to kill him but he has no courage to do so. According to Jainism, his very thought of killing amounts to actual killing. Violence in thought is more dangerous than physical violence. Verbal violence generates enmity, so the nonviolent Jain tradition enjoins its followers to first nib the seed of violence in thought, then overcome wrath and abstain from using harsh words for anyone. If a person

develops emotional competence, he remains calm in all favourable and unfavourable situations, he will not do anything wrong.

The Jain path of peace lies in every one's emotional competence and all the Jain vows have been formulated to keep a person's evil propensities under control. The way to peace lies in a nonviolent lifestyle.

We discover the echo of a similar way of thinking in the preamble of the constitution of UNESCO which begins with these words, *'That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'*

(i) *An Echo of the Jain Thought in Seville Statement*

Until 1985, most psychologists, social scientists, anthropologists and biologists of the world believed that conflict is man's intrinsic tendency. Human brain is biologically so constructed that it is bound to be violent but this myth was dispelled by twenty top social scientists, biologists, anthropologists and sociologists who had gathered in Seville on the occasion of the international year of peace in 1985 to consider this question. At the end of the historic statement called Seville Statement they had issued on this occasion they said – *"Just as war begins in the mind of man peace also begins in the same mind. The race that invented war is also capable of inventing peace. The responsibility lies on each of us."*

I agree that it is the duty of every responsible citizen of the world to create an ambience of peace and love at least in his or her family so that his or her children imbibe these values and grow to be peaceful citizens. Both Acharya Tulsi and Acharya Mahapragya, the two legendary Jain Acharyas, suggested a global campaign to train children and youths in nonviolence and bring about a mass psychological transformation. Training in nonviolence alone can combat violence.

(ii) *Unrest Leads to Armament : Peace Results in Limitation of Arms*

Armament or piling of arms depends on peacelessness. If there is unrest in humanity, armament increases. If the universal mind is at peace, limitation of arms begins. The basic cause of peacelessness is the human tendency to grab material resources and accumulate wealth. It may be termed as the imperialism of possessiveness (*parigraha*). We must not lose sight of the relationship between accumulation of wealth and violence. In the days gone by wars were fought mainly for woman and land. The age of territorial imperialism has ended. The age in which we are living is the age of economic imperialism and ideological hegemony which is largely responsible for wars. In this perspective the principle of the battle with the self is very significant. Decentralized economy (minimization of desire and possessions) and minimization of violence become possible only when man's battle with the self begins and he is able to conquer it.

If we think of world peace and disarmament, we will have to pay heed to a system of decentralized economic system and political power. Lord Mahavira's philosophy of ahimsa is like a pillar of light. In the ancient days man's desire was minimum. He didn't have any of the comforts the modern man enjoys today. He had to use his hands and legs more and more to fulfil his limited desire. There were no cars, no buses, no trains, no airplanes, no engine driven ships and no machines to carry out his activities. The obvious benefit of his limited needs and restrained desire was good health and inner happiness. Since he had to do everything manually, he had to toil in the fields in the blazing sun and walk long ways. Life was slow but people were, more or less, happy. The wars were fought between kings, emperors and their soldiers. Common man remained unaffected by them. Of course sometimes they fell victim to the cruelty of the soldiers of the victorious armies. Since life was slow the ecological system of the earth also remained unaffected. The earth's carrying capacity remained intact. Whatever the earth lost was compensated and this ecological and environmental balance was naturally maintained.

(iii) *Lord Mahavira's Vision*

Lord Mahavira says that there are three categories of human beings in this world :-

(i) The first category comprises those who are fiercely ambitious and possess *mahaichcha* (intense desire), indulge in *arambha* (inessential worldly activities), hatred and accumulate material objects beyond limits (*mahaparigrahi*). Such people always remain immersed in *adharma* (unrighteousness), promote and derive pleasure from it, involve themselves in it deeply and their conduct and character are wholly unrighteous. They earn their livelihood by means of *adharma*.

(ii) The second category comprises those whose desires (*ichha*) are minimum and whose worldly activities (*arambha*) and possessions (wealth) are the least. Such people are righteous (*dharmika*), they expound *dharma* (righteousness), practise it, remain deeply attached to it and their conduct and character are dominated by *dharma*. They earn their livelihood by honest and righteous means only.

(iii) The third category comprises those who completely abstain from worldly activities (*arambha*), own no possessions (wealth) and are *dharmika* (righteous). They practise *dharma*, remain engrossed in *dharma* and witness to *dharma*. Their conduct and character are disciplined by *dharma* and they earn their livelihood by honest and righteous means.

When the world is dominated by the people of the first category as mentioned above, it mostly remains strife-torn, conflicts and quarrels take place on trivial grounds or even without provocation, animosity and hatred rule the roost. Corruption, injustice, nepotism, murders, rapes, etc. flourish. If the two neighbouring countries are overwhelmed with such people, wars are bound to erupt. *"For a peaceful and nonviolent world, says Lord Mahavira, it is imperative that the people belonging to the second and third categories increase. Vile and vicious mind, harsh and abusive words, base deeds and non-abstinence are the main source of war and conflicts in the world."*

Jainism admits that wars and conflicts cannot be eliminated altogether but they can be avoided or minimized. No one should glorify war. Gautam said to Lord

Mahavira, "O Lord ! many people were engaged in discussion and were saying that the people who are wounded or killed in war are born as gods in heaven. How can it be possible?" Lord Mahavira replied, "Those who say so are not correct." He explained that many people join the army for their livelihood, become soldiers or commanders in chief of their respective armies. They have to fight as they are bound by their duty. He then narrated the story of a brave warrior called Varun Kumar of Vaishali City. Though he was a warrior, he worshipped ascetics and knew what *jiva* and *ajiva* (sentient and non-sentient beings) were. When a neighbouring king attacked his country he was commanded by his superiors in the army to take part in the war and he obeyed them. Before he embarked on his mission he fasted for three days. He vowed that he would not be the first to strike and hit his enemy. He reached the battlefield and stood face to face with a warrior who challenged him to shoot or fire his arrow at him but he refused since he had taken a vow not to hit his enemy first. He asked his opponent to strike first. At Varun's utterance the opposing warrior flew into a rage, took the bow in his hand and wounded Varun seriously. Varun was aflame with anger and shot the arrow at his opponent with such ferocity that he died instantaneously. Though Varun had killed his enemy, he felt considerably weak and exhausted. He knew that he would die soon. He disembarked from his horse, freed it and made a bed of straw. Turning his face towards the east he sat in a meditative posture and paid his obeisance to the liberated souls, *arhats* and Tirthankaras. He also paid obeisance to Lord Mahavira who showed him the Jain path of purity. He took the vow of *santhara* (he would not eat or drink water till he died). After the vow of *santhara* he took off his armour, lay on the bed of straw and died peacefully.

Gautam asked Lord Mahavira where his soul went to after death. The Lord replied that he was born a god in Arunabha Viman of Soudharm Kalp. The other warriors were born as fish or landed in hell. Those who say that the soldiers who die in a war are born in heaven are absolutely wrong. It is the state of the mind of the soldier while dying that determines his next birth. If the warrior has an equanimous

attitude while dying, pays obeisance to pious souls and washes off the feelings of enmity towards those whom he fought in the war, he is certain to get a berth in heaven. But those warriors who die in indignation and hatred during the war are born as animals or land in hell to suffer for their sins. Those who say that everyone who dies in a battlefield is born in heaven are promoting falsehood.

I conclude with the observations made by Dr. Nathmal Tatia , the doyen among the Jain scholars, in the introduction to Tattvartha Sutra which he had translated into English.

"The main principles of Jainism are nonviolence, non-absolutism and non-possession. Nonviolence strengthens the autonomy of life of every being. Non-absolutism strengthens the autonomy of thought of every individual. Non-possession strengthens the interdependence of all existence. If you feel that every soul is autonomous you will never trample on its right to live. If you feel every person is a thinking person you will not trample on his or her thoughts. If you feel that you own nothing and no-one, you will not trample on the planet. In the second century CE, when the Jaina philosopher-monk Umasvati wrote the Tattvartha Sutra, these principles were the only way to global peace. Today, this is even more the case. These are the only values that can save humanity from the deadly acts of war, economic exploitation and environmental destruction."

Jainism is a religion of Peace and purity. Its three principles i.e. Ahimsa (nonviolence), Aparigraha (non-possession) and Anekant (Non-absolutism) constitute a roadmap to universal peace. The Jain ascetics observe the vows of complete abstinence from all forms of violence in thought, word and deed, non-possession (Digambara Jain ascetics do not own clothes too. They remain nude) and non-absolutism in their entirety. For householders there are twelve *anuvrats* which enjoin them to refrain from inessential violence, making false statements, taking anything not given, maintaining illicit sexual relationship possessing wealth

beyond a limit. One who accepts these vows is also asked to restrict his or her travel, limit the quantity of things that he will use throughout the day, abstain from purposeless and harmful activities and refrain from all sinful activities for a period of 48 minutes every day. He is also asked to reduce for a limited period of time the limits of the area set forth in the preceding vow and fast and live like a monk for certain days in a year. Lastly the most important vow for an *anuvrati* is to share his resources with the deserving persons. It is also said that a person who refuses to share his food or clothes with the needy will never be liberated.

These small vows are the quintessence of the three principles of Jainism elucidated above. There can be no better plan for a peaceful and nonviolent universe than the code of conduct consisting of Lord Mahavira's twelve small vows meant for householders.

– Dr. Sohan Lal Gandhi
B-402, Nagar Residency
Main Calgary Road, Malviya Nagar
Jaipur - 302 017 (Raj.) INDIA
Ph : +91-141-2525829 / 4050991
(M) : +91-98280 16989
e-mail : slgandhi@hotmail.com