

IS THE CREATION OF A PEACEFUL WORLD POSSIBLE? SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

The world today is full of violence. Every time we turn a news channel on our TV, we see scenes of murders, rapes, vandalism and hatred. Terrorism has made our lives most insecure and full of suffering. When a person steps out of his house he is not sure whether he will return alive. We also see that most parts of the world today are conflict ridden. These conflicts owe their origin to religion, caste, colour, exploitation, poverty and unequal sharing of resources on which our survival depends. But it is an irony that some religious fanatics incite their followers to kill those who do not believe in their religion. If we look at history we will be shocked to learn that more than 600 wars – big or small – were fought in the name of religion. Now the question that arises is whether peace is possible in such a tense environment that we see in the world today. My answer is 'yes' peace is possible if we are able to eradicate the root causes of conflicts.

Before we go deeper into various aspects involved in peace let us first try to define what we mean by peace. The western concept of peace is mere absence of war. They believe that peace will prevail on this planet if all the weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons are destroyed. For them peace means disarmament. Of course, the presence of weapons of mass destruction do pose a great menace to the very existence of humanity but mere absence of these weapons is not a guarantee for peace. Even if we succeed in eliminating nuclear weapons there is every possibility that if a new Hitler comes into this world, he will create these weapons again. So if we want peace we will have to concentrate our efforts on transforming human psyche. Disarmament is also a vitally important aspect of peace but there are some other more important deeper aspects of peace which are needed to be looked into.

In reality peace means harmony in all walks of human life. In other words we can say that peace means freedom from fear of violence and hostility. The seeds of peace or war first sprout in human mind. So the human mind first needs to be cleansed of violence and hatred if we want universal peace. Prior to the issuing of the Seville Statement on Violence by twenty leading scientists, anthropologists, sociologists and biologists from around the world who had gathered at Seville in 1985 under the auspices of UNESCO, it was widely believed that the human mind is biologically so constructed that war is

intrinsic to human nature. But this myth was demolished by these scientists who made it clear that evidence doesn't show that war is a part of human nature. Explaining the UNESCO constitution they concluded that "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."

From the Seville statement it becomes clear that world peace will continue to elude us till every one of us involves himself in the process of peace which actually begins from within our hearts. Have efforts for peace ever been made at the level of human heart? Our system of education is rooted in materialistic goals which include money, wealth and affluence. 'The culture of heart' which Mahatma Gandhi considered the sole basis of peace and refined behaviour has been completely lost sight of. He even went to the extent of saying that the only goal of education should be the education of the culture of the heart. After the famous Seville statement many schools and universities of Europe introduced peace education in school and college curricula. It is imperative that moral education becomes an integral part of our system of education. It is also a fact that misuse of scientific theories and data have been used to justify violence and war. The theory of evolution has been used to justify not only war but also genocide, colonialism and suppression of the weak.

We must also take into consideration one significant point made in the Seville statement. It says, "War is biologically possible but it is not inevitable as evidenced by its variation in occurrence and nature over time and space. There are cultures which have not engaged in war for centuries and there are cultures which have engaged in war at sometimes and not at others." For the incidents of bloodshed and ghastly crimes it will be foolish to condemn biology. Human mind which is the source of both war and peace can be transformed. War can be avoided by exposing children to thoughtful activity listening to the teachings of great souls like Lord Rama, Lord Krishan, Bhagwan Mahavira, Bhagwan Buddha, Jesus Christ, Prophet Mohammed and all sages and saints. They all stood for peace. In Jainism it is stated "The basis of all the Arhats who have come into this world and those who will be born in the future is peace." Peace is the basis of the survival of all the living beings of this earth. Peace emanates from a certain type of behavioural restraint.

In Yajurveda (36.17), it is said, "May there be peace in the heavens, peace in the atmosphere, peace on the earth. Let there be coolness in the water, healing in the herbs and peace radiating from the trees. Let there be harmony in the planets and the stars and perfection in eternal knowledge. May everything in the universe be at peace. Let peace pervade everywhere, at all times. May I experience that peace within my own heart."

The Buddhists believe that suffering is the real cause of peacelessness. All suffering stems from our greed, aversion and delusion. There can be no peace till all suffering is eliminated. Lord Buddha emphasizes adherence to the four noble truths for a lasting peace. Jesus Christ has been called 'Prince of Peace'. He told his followers that love is the greatest religion. Where there is love, peace is inevitable. There is an inspiring incident from his life. It is said that once when Jesus and some other people were travelling by boat in the sea of Galilee, a violent storm broke. There were about twenty people in the boat which began to capsize. The people began to scream and wail. Some of them noted that despite this terrible storm there was one man in the boat who was fast asleep. They shook him. He at once woke up and saw that the people in boat were terrified due to the storm. This man was Jesus. He said to them 'Do you not have faith in yourselves' and turning to the turbulent Galilee he said, 'Peace, be still' and lo ! the sea became calm instantly as though it was a child who often becomes quiet when his mother shouts at him. This incident shows that if a man is at peace within even nature follows his command. Peaceful thinking and emotions alone can create universal peace. Jesus had conquered his passions and was an embodiment of peace.

For universal peace we must go to the root. Let there be a global movement to educate the people in basic human values. Unless an attitudinal change occurs in an individual he can neither be at peace within nor can he eschew violence. At the same time we should also keep trying to create a world without weapons. The world had already witnessed an unprecedented catastrophe of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in which two million people were killed instantly. Millions died later due to radiation and related ailments. After this tragedy nuclear disarmament became a moral imperative for many right thinking people of the world. They feared that another nuclear explosion might even result in the extinction of the human race itself. Prominent scientists, writers and intellectuals organized conferences, wrote manifestoes, made speeches and even marched

on the streets in support of the disarmament movement that swept the world. The manifesto issued on July 09, 1955 in London by the celebrated philosopher Bertrand Russell and the most revered scientist of the twentieth century Albert Einstein was the most remarkable one. It said, *"In the tragic situation which confronts humanity we feel that scientists should assemble in conference to appraise the perils that have arisen as a result of the development of weapons of mass destruction and to discuss a resolution in the spirit of the appended draft. We are speaking on this occasion, not as members of this or that nation, continent or creed but as human beings, members of the species Man, whose continued existence is in doubt."*

The manifesto was signed by, besides Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, nine other Nobel Laureates and ended with the resolution :

"In view of the fact that in any future world war nuclear weapons will be employed and that such weapons threaten the continued existence of mankind, we urge the Governments of the world to realize and acknowledge publicly, that their purpose cannot be furthered by a world war and we urge them, consequently, to find peaceful means for the settlement of all disputes between them."

Thanks to the innumerable protests, agitations and rallies that stirred the world's conscience against the horrors of nuclear weapons that after Hiroshima-Nagasaki tragedy no nation could ever dare to use a nuclear bomb to settle its dispute. The presence of United Nations that came into existence in the wake of the nuclear holocaust also played an important role in preventing the third world war. Under its auspices nuclear states agreed to reduce the number of nuclear heads that were in their possession but the threat of a nuclear war has not yet been eliminated. Now many small countries have also armed themselves with nuclear weapons. The five permanent members of the Security Council which possess a large number of nuclear weapons are not ready to destroy them but they are imposing restrictions on small nations to destroy their weapons. It has created an environment of hostility at global level.

As regards the possibility of creating a peaceful world the present scenario seems to be dismal. UN has created some important bodies to continue its efforts for disarmament not only in areas of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons but also conventional weapons, regional conflicts and terrorism. Despite these multitudinous

efforts at various levels to move towards total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and to make this world a safer place for future generations, the outlook at present is not so bright. I would like to quote a paragraph from the speech of the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan which he delivered in New York in Nov 2000.

"There are reportedly more than 30,000 nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the nuclear Powers, with thousands still deployed on hair-trigger alert. The three key treaties seeking the total elimination of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction do not have universal adherence. The second stage of the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START II) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) have yet to enter into force.

For the last two years, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to take even the basic step of agreeing on a programme of work, despite a growing need for new agreements on nuclear disarmament, fissile materials, and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Nationalism and ethnic tensions continue to be major ingredients in the outbreak of war. And many details about the production and sale of conventional arms also remain shrouded from public scrutiny."

Kofi Annan's speech makes it clear that UN disarmament cell failed to take even the basic steps of agreeing on a programme of work. There was a need for new treaties too. Moreover there is a potential danger of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of Jihadi groups who have already caused havoc in many parts of the world. The illicit trade of arms that goes on unchecked so far is also contributing to peacelessness and unrest in the world.

It has already been stated that 'Wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.' Mere disarmament cannot bring about peace. Simultaneously we need to create a genuine culture of peace. UNESCO was created in Nov 1946 to create a global movement for peace through culture and education. In Sept 1999 UN General Assembly adopted a Declaration on a Culture of Peace so that governments and civil societies could be guided to promote and strengthen a culture of peace in the new millennium. The Declaration proclaimed that a culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life based on respect for life, respect for the principles of sovereignty, respect for human

rights and fundamental freedoms, commitment to peace etc. Subsequently UN declared the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World (2001-2010). The world body agreed that the following eight areas span the full range of actions needed for the transition from a culture of conflict to a culture of peace.

- a. A culture of peace through education ;*
- b. Sustainable economic and social development ;*
- c. Respect for all human rights ;*
- d. Equality between women and men ;*
- e. Democratic participation ;*
- f. Understanding, tolerance and solidarity ;*
- g. Participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge ;*
- h. International peace and security.*

This Decade of a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World was implemented by UNESCO. Thousands of organizations were declared global actors for peace. It generated tremendous enthusiasm among children at global level.

I feel that it was wrong to limit this campaign to only ten years. It should have been a regular activity of UNESCO. Now in the absence of such constructive initiatives for peace youths and children are more inclined towards a culture of violence. It is our responsibility to continue and persevere in our efforts to create a peaceful world. I know that the task is stupendous but if we have a will, we will succeed.