

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

EDUCATION FOR NURTURING PEACE CULTURE

Motilal Sharma

PEACE CULTURE: THE CONCEPT

The concept and practice of peace revolve around and penetrate five layers of social units. First happens to be the individual, then the family, followed by the community, the nation and finally, the international community. They all inter-twine and relate with each other. This interconnectedness is best understood when examined singularly and then in combination. Let us first deal with the individual. Peace for an individual is a state of mind, which allows him to operate optimally and freely. Secondly, there must be opportunity for the individual to grow in body and mind, in emotions and spirit, in isolation and in communion with others.

The family is second layer of any peace initiative. The family remains the nucleus of society, and while negative forces viz war, famine, disease, ignorance, want and exploitation repeatedly threaten to rend the family nucleus apart, it still remains the kernel of society. It is within these confines that the seeds of attitudes, values, traits, psychosocial and emotional norms and concepts begin to take shape.

This brings us to the third layer, the community of families. This is the immediate surrounding (other than the members of the family) to which the children are exposed. In these social structures, families are virtually bombarded with huge nets of social biases, political and vested interests, economic inequalities, religious rigidities and norms, cultural patterns and propaganda, technological mechanization, and wave upon wave of psycho-behavioural norms and standards. If children are loosely anchored to their families, and are left without guidance to these social and community forces, then the initiations into confusion, hatred, self-pity and eventually violence begin their slow and dangerous trend.

The fourth layer of the social unit is the nation. Nations are marked by their strength of vision and the histories of their people. Yet the poor nations that comprise the Third and Fourth Worlds have not, in the past centuries, been able to break their bondages of poverty, ignorance and disease. A large part of their misery and state of under-development stem from forces beyond their control, originating from their former colonial masters and the super-powers obsessed with global designs of control and dominance.

The fifth layer, the international community is from a practical and policy point of view, a starting point for a global movement for peace. A super-power such as the United States of America is inching towards the realization that peace, is the best policy for their own and global interests; that peace, after all, is the most positive element for an environment of development and growth. Peace should be the byword and the end word for development.

PEACE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION: AN OLD CONCEPT

All human beings are endowed with the seeds of compassion. When exposed to right conditions at home, in society at large, and later perhaps through our pointed efforts in schools (through education or training), the seed will grow. We have seen many examples in life and history which show that violent behaviour is not inherited, and children of criminals turn out to be good human beings, and given a good environment, became useful citizens.

Violence does not appear either as part of our evolutionary legacy or in our genes. It is in our sociological and cultural roots. Individuals are normally ready to adapt to their environment and, under normal circumstances, prefer cooperation to aggression and non-violence to violence. Unlike any other creature on this planet, human beings can learn and understand, without having experienced. They can think themselves into other people's mind; imagine themselves into other people's places. So, education and ideas of peace development have the possibility of making things change. Education moreover, needs to be the business of citizens and not limited to classroom teachers.

The organic wholeness of the human being is quite essential in order to achieve lasting peace at the global level. Man is broken up from within, and this inner disintegration is reflected in the disorganized state of human system at all levels. This disharmony lends to disturbances. There is a need therefore for the creation and care of integrated individuals. The culture of peace should be understood as the creation of peaceful, and non-violent behavioural patterns. The main values on which a peace culture can be built may be grouped around such key notions as justice, human rights, democracy, development, non-violence, and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

It is through education that the broadest possible introduction can be provided to the values, skills, and knowledge that form the basis of respect for peace, human rights and democratic principles. Peace development education refers to a participatory and well-directed programme within and between human systems, such as individual, family, community, country and the world community. It is a process towards reclaiming of man's innate state of happiness. It should focus on the emotional development of a human being, (in

particular the youth,) to strengthen the individual's attributes of compassion and a life for others. The goal should be to inculcate wholesome behaviour and character in the individual. Participation in peace development education aims at the fundamental reorganization of our inner map of reality: away from fear, distrust and hostility toward a change in the way we perceive our relationships with others. Peace development requires the creation and nurturing of a shared image of the global human future free from religious, cultural, economic, ethnical and sex consideration. It should aim to maintain and respect the diversity of our varied cultural and social systems.

Peace development education is characterized by spiritual growth, ecological balance, decreased violence (which is not limited to physical but includes economic, technological, structural, political, social and ideological forms), and increased cooperation, justice and equity leading to self-reliance especially on the part of the youth. Social cohesion must be strengthened through peace development education, teaching people - whatever their religion, ethnicity or gender - to respect one another. The positive and non-violent resolution of conflict must be taught from kindergarten through university. No matter what level of education they reach, students would then carry the culture of peace throughout their lives.

Peace development education should be experiential and participatory using a variety of examples and community based projects. The positive and non-violent resolution of conflict at the personal, inter-personal, family, community, national and international levels require to be learnt. Curriculum development should reflect the values of society – not only mirror the present but also envision a desired future. Peace development education should focus first on equipping students with positive attitudes about life. The curriculum should reflect the peaceful values of society and provide a path to understanding and embracing them. Love, respect and vision are the foundations for a culture of peace. Toys, games and leisure products should move away from themes of war, violence and conflict. These should instead focus on social cohesion, peaceful behaviour, conflict resolution and promotion of peace. Community based peace development circles should be established for students to interact directly with the community and serve as bridges between groups or sectors in conflict. These should teach the youth not only to tolerate differences but also to respect differences. Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the absence of violent resolution of conflict, for conflict comes in ever-changing forms. This collective consciousness, the “awareness of awareness”, can only be achieved through strong and vigorous peace development education involving all people, from leaders to the poor. The universalization of peace development should be a priority goal of the leadership in the 21st century.

PEACE POLICY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The United Nations (UN), through its General Assembly and world conferences of Ministries of Youth, has passed several declarations regarding youth development, covering promotion of ideals of peace, mutual respect, and international understanding. However, these declarations have not been translated into national policies by member countries. At the UN General Assembly, there have been four major strategic declarations addressing peace development issues:

- (A) Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect, and Understanding Between People (1965)
- (B) UN Guidelines for Further Planning and Suitable Follow Up in the Field of Peace (1985)
- (C) World Program of Action to Year 2000 and Beyond (1995)
- (D) The Lisbon Declaration of Youth Policies and Programs (1998)

UN member countries sign these declarations. But the experience since 1965 indicates that governments and their ministers sign these documents as a matter of routine, and without commitment. However, at the Lisbon Declaration, the Ministries of Youth Services from the UN member-countries agreed to avoid lip service and committed to promote relevant UN programs. Funds have been earmarked and specialized agencies and other bodies within and outside the UN system have been associated to give greater support to national youth policies and programs within their country programs. This will bring the donor community to support development of peace policies and related actions and provide resources for their implementation as part of national developmental interventions.

A number of peace resolutions have been passed over the years, but with little effect, because these were framed in various international forums and, not on the ground by and for the people. Only from the people can national policies emerge. Only from the participation of people can meaningful world resolutions emerge. There is, therefore, a need for each government to adopt a National Peace Policy. Parallel with this, a National Peace Development Education Policy for Youth can be framed and adopted at the grassroots level. This should be based on a review of the country's constraints and achievements towards peace development and democratic activities, youth's aspirations and the prospects for future action. Its foundation will be tolerance in every sphere of human activities- religious, moral, ethnic, political, socioeconomic, cultural, government, military and international. To this end, it should set up institutional infrastructure such as District Youth Peace Development Fund, Youth Peace Development Forums in schools and villages peace development circles up to national level.

YOUTH AND PEACE DEVELOPMENT

In the world today, one person in five is between the ages of 15 to 25, which is an accepted UN definition of the age that defines youth. There are more than one billion youth, constituting a formidable force. About 85 percent of youth live in the developing countries of which more than 800 million are in the Asian region. Today's youth are often sceptical about adult leaders and they may express the desire to participate in society through volunteer work but not in politics. International studies clearly indicate that today's youth are concerned about issues relating to family, education and employment. They should be perceived as key agents for social change, including peace development, economic development and technological innovation. The paradox is that even as they represent society's greatest hope, they are a group, which risks an uncertain and unstable future.

To put peace development education in practice an operative system of youth peace development forums, beginning at the school/community level then upwards to the national forum needs to be developed. Within the scope of international agreements, and in contrast to the reality of dismal implementation of the past, an operative system of youth peace development education activities can be proposed. Their planning, membership, policy framework, programs and activities shall be initiated, led, and implemented by the youth, supported by adults and community leaders.

The first entry of youth to community activity could be at the secondary school level, specifically in the final year of secondary school. It will be useful to establish at the school level, the school/community youth council for peace development, which will discuss and address peace-related issues and prepare students in terms of attitudinal formation in which they are given a good understanding of why peace should be the first preference, (not conflict) and how to help the community in resolving conflict situations.

Youth leadership activities cannot be confined to schools. They should be exposed to the real socio-political environment. The school/community youth council should send selected senior class students as representatives to village and municipal councils. These councils should deal with the real life situations as they are outside the youth's immediate environment (the school). They should engage youth in the development of strategies on how to develop the culture of peace and development of pro-peace initiatives. This will serve two purposes: First, it will groom future leaders through involvement in the management of school and participation in the governance of the village and municipality and secondly, it would provide the youth with the opportunities to participate in community governance and development activities.

At the District level development and implementation of action plans

based on state and national policy should be supported by setting up a District Youth Peace Development Fund. District funds can finance youth activities at lower levels (Municipal/Village and School). They will develop and establish District Youth Councils, implement policies as well as provide and mobilize resources.

At the State or Provincial level there should be participation of youth and appropriate policy should be developed to bring youth from youth councils to legislatures as active members. Students from colleges and universities – who are above 18 years of age and can vote, should also be allowed to participate there. They should prepare policy and set up forums for activities for youth participation in peace development. There can be a special department at the state level for youth to support youth activities, responsible for supporting and monitoring activities of District Youth Peace Development Fund.

At the National level the national government, having developed the National Peace Policy and the National Peace Development Policy for Youth, must now be the guiding light in extensive awareness building and implementation of these policies at the ground level. Peace development activities now require to be institutionalized. This will further be strengthened through social marketing in which traditional media (such as radio, TV, movies, print publications, posters, direct mail, etc.), and non-traditional media (such as street dramas, poetry and song festivals, youth assemblies during festivals, setup of the Speakers' Bureau, etc.) will be used. Modern electronic media shall also be used to support such activities. Annually, there should be a Youth Peace Parliament where outstanding youth peace workers can be given prizes and recognition by communities.

The national peace development youth forums will send representatives to participate in the development of peace development policies at the international level. This will ensure that these are based on strengthened international understanding and that appropriate mechanisms are put in place and executed for effective implementation through participation and ownership of the various resolutions of the UN, fully using their resource base and sense of proprietorship of these forums. At the global level, there are many possibilities for involving the youth: volunteer clubs, education and training camps and internship institutes; political postings and exchange programs among the youth of socialist, capitalist, and command-economy countries; cultural exchange programs; and youth cadre in international peace-keeping and war-conflict resolutions etc.

Our obligation, as adults who want to empower young people, is to help them define realistic objectives and devise workable plans for achieving them. Adults should be in committees not to lead but to participate and enable –

teachers and social leaders must commit themselves to letting the youth lead, otherwise the forum will not achieve the objective of youth empowerment. Leaders among the adults and youth leaders available in communities should be identified and used to help youth, at the lower levels.

As elders, we have all, at some time, eaten the fruit from trees that we did not plant. In the fullness of time, when it is our turn to give, it also behoves us to plant gardens that we may never eat the fruit of, which may benefit generations to come. This is our sacred responsibility and we need to shoulder it.

To conclude, it can be observed that we are today a part of a world where many regions suffer from increasing tensions, conflicts, and violence. Making peace a tangible reality is of critical importance. The world today is indeed in search of a new culture and a common system of values and new behavioural patterns for individuals, groups and nations. Without these, the major problems of international and internal peace cannot be solved. What we achieve within will change outer reality.

This awareness and knowledge of oneself is what ultimately helps develop a more grounded belief in oneself, courage, determination, and, above all, humility, qualities which enable one to participate effectively in peace development initiatives. The concept of "Vashudev Kutumbakam" needs to be followed so that the boundaries of the self are extended to include the world as one's family. Such a view promotes fellow feeling and kindles a deep desire to live together peacefully. People exist anthropologically not in their isolation but in the completeness of relation among themselves. The new millennium offers the people a unique opportunity to reflect on their common destiny, at a moment when they find themselves interconnected as never before. In this new world, groups and individuals interact directly across the frontiers more often, without involving the state. This also has its dangers in terms of crime, narcotics, terrorism, weapons, refugees and migrants; all move back and forth faster and in greater numbers than in the past. If we are to get the best out of globalization and modern technologies as well as avoid the worst, we must learn to govern better with emphasis on good governance and strengthening of civil society, and how to govern better together.

A final word: Even people who want to go to heaven do not want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. Death is very likely the single best investment of life. It is Life's change agent. Our time is limited, so we should not be wasting it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by faith, belief, dogma's-which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Have the courage to follow your own intelligence and intuition. Let us live and work for peace and harmony. We all are temporary custodians of resources we generate. The best use of our life and resources is to share them with those less fortunate and for the development of peace and harmony.