



Education in the Transforming World



Dr. Swapan Kumar Maity

Dr. Pranab Barman



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Editors

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NEW ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS
NEW DELHI-110002

New Academic Publishers

4760-61/23, Ansari Road

Daryaganj

New Delhi - 110002

INDIA

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First Edition: July, 2021

ISBN : 978-81-953037-3-1

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Published by Vinay Puri for New Academic Publishers, New Delhi -110002
(INDIA).

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CHAPTER - 20

EDUCATION FOR PEACE AND HARMONY: AN OVERVIEW

Dr. Samit Kumar Maiti

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Seva Bharati Mahavidyalaya, Kapgari, Jhargram,
West Bengal, India*

Abstract

Peace and harmony are unquestionably the issues of topmost priority in the present climate of troubled international relations. Given the fact that we live at a time when the nations are engaged in the competition for nuclear weapons, the issues of peace and harmony attain special importance in the question of security and sustenance of mankind. Despite the principles of international relations enshrined in the Charter of United Nations, peace and harmony are yet to be established in the international arena. There is hardly any contention in the view that education for peace and harmony is the most vital component and the potent force against the forces of war, conflict, violence, disintegration and disruption. The paper argues that when the international organizations fail, education can act as the effective catalyst for bringing about the much needed world peace and harmony for the survival of mankind.

Keywords: *Education, peace, harmony, war, conflict.*

INTRODUCTION

Abolition of war and establishing peace and harmony among the nations are of paramount importance for mankind in the present times, particularly at a time when almost each and every nation is equipped with the nuclear weapons and the relations of the nations are disturbed over various geo-political factors at national and international levels. Every nation and every human being has the right to live in peace. Respect for that right is in the common interest of mankind and an indispensable condition for peace, prosperity and advancement. Despite the declarations of the governments, the principles of international relations espoused in the Charter of United Nations are not fully maintained, thus perpetuating the imperialistic dominations of the powerful nations and jeopardizing the climate of world peace. In many parts of the world, the armed conflicts are a perpetual phenomenon. The arms race, which absorbs vast material resources and spoils men's creative potentials, still continues to pose the biggest threat to the whole of humanity. Indeed, the "strengthening

and guaranteeing of world peace is the factor on which depends not only the development of mankind or the fates of our civilization but the very existence of life on our planet, the biological survival of man" (Symonides, 1980, 234). There is hardly any doubt that education is the most powerful way to avert the threat of war and to consolidate international peace and harmony. It is essential for social change necessary for peace-making and peace-building efforts worldwide. With the belief that a peaceful world is a warless world, the peace education over the years has specifically focussed on the abolition of war and all its causes.

Definitions of 'Peace'

The word 'peace' is surcharged with multiple meanings. At an intrapersonal level, the term 'peace of mind' refers to a mental state free from inner conflicts. If this 'peace of mind' is disturbed enough, an individual may commit suicide, which is tantamount to doing violence to oneself. From this intrapersonal level of analysis the meaning of the word 'peace' can be extended to refer to the interpersonal level of international relations. In the domain of international relations the word 'peace' is used to denote the state of relations between the nations. The word further designates the internal peace in a country, in a society, between the diverse social classes, organizations, and social structures. In ethics or morality the word is used to refer to an individual's frame of mind or human relationships and attitudes. The word 'peace' thus eludes a universally accepted definition because of its polysemantic nature. Peace, in its broader connotation, does not simply mean the absence of war but "absence of hostility among states, peaceful coexistence and friendly relations, elimination of all forms of inequity and oppression which could give rise to conflicts and establishment of just and equitable social structures" (Symonides, 1980, 235). Peace is therefore nonviolence, non-hurting, or non-injury, or ahimsa in the Gandhian tradition (Eckhardt, 1988b, 66), and it is a necessary condition for the growth and development of the nations and mankind.

Causes of War

It is very difficult to identify a particular cause of war. In fact, there have been divergent causes of war. The origin of war has most commonly been interpreted in the nature of man, in his inclination towards violence and aggressiveness, and his passion for power.

The other cause of war is the imperfection of the international system that allows unrestricted freedom of action for the nations in their economic, political and military competition, and prejudices and lack of understanding among nations. Apart from this, economic disparity, fundamentalism, fascism, nationalism, racialism, bureaucracy, overpopulation, pollution, religion, technology, etc. are also responsible for the origin of war.

The origin of war has found its most convincing explanation in Marxism. Marx, Engels and Lenin argued that wars are not the naturally occurring phenomenon but the products of a particular socio-economic conditions.

The Arms Race and its Negative Consequences

The dangers of arms race of the nations are easily comprehensible. The Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations of June 1978 offered a comprehensive measure to disarmament. It stated that today's world is faced with an unprecedented threat of self-extinction of mankind because of a dangerous competition in the accumulation of the most destructive weapons ever produced. The numbers of nuclear weapons possessed by the nations are more than sufficient to wipe out the civilisation from the face of the earth.

Military expenditures are steadily on the rise. The huge waste of resources is meaningless given the fact that a large section of the world population still live in poverty and malnutrition. The arms race is therefore a major impediment to the socio-economic development.

The arms race, particularly in the nuclear field, and the invention of new types of ultra-modern weapons with the use of science and technology, is the most horrible threat to world peace. The arms race is not in consonance with the principles of international peace enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and it can hamper the stability of the international relations by weakening the mutual confidence of the nations. Today's nuclear war has all the potencies to annihilate the entire humanity.

Education for Peace

As an academic discipline, education for peace has attained a considerable importance over the years. It is primarily concerned with the study of violence and alternatives to violence. According to Betty Reardon, peace education is the transmission of knowledge about the requirements of, the obstacles to and possibilities for achieving and maintaining peace, training in skills for interpreting the knowledge, and the development of reflective and participatory capacities for applying the knowledge to overcoming problems and achieving possibilities. (Reardon, 2000, 4)

Peace education is often distinguished from education for peace. Peace education is education on peace-related content, but education for peace is a holistic approach to education that aims at shaping individuals and societies. However, these two processes are not mutually exclusive. The main objective of the peace educator is "to educate students about issues related to peace, conflict, and violence, and to transmit ideas and values that can infuse our students with ways of engaging in the world that adds to its potential for peace" (Barbara & Prasad 2007, 24). Education for peace is a process that involves influencing the people to behave more peacefully and preventing violence for the promotion of peace in society and world at large. It is seriously engaged in transforming ways of thinking that have developed over the centuries of human history.

Education for peace is a broad area of study that particularly focuses on the major issues like conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict

transformation, nonviolence studies, peace studies, peace research, and peace science. Education for peace is equally concerned with education for democracy, civic education, tolerance education, or human rights education.

David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson in their article entitled "Essential Components of Peace Education" (2005) maintain that peace can be classified into two types: imposed peace and consensual peace. Imposed peace is "based on domination, power, imposition, and enforcement. High-power groups use their economic and military power to force low-power groups to end hostilities and implement the peace accords" (Johnson & Johnson 2005, 281). And consensual peace is "based on reaching an agreement that (a) ends violence and hostilities and (b) establishes a new relationship based on harmonious interaction aimed at achieving mutual goals, justly distributing mutual benefits, being mutually dependent on each other's resources, and establishing a mutual identity" (Johnson & Johnson 2005, 282). Imposed peace does not resolve the underlying grievances and fails to establish lasting relationship among the disputants. In contrast to imposed peace, in consensual peace the disputants accept that peace is desirable, legitimate, just, and beneficial. It successfully establishes a lasting relationship because it is based on the mutual interdependence. Education for peace is designed for the perpetuation of consensual peace.

United Nations General Assembly in its "Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace" on 15 December 1978 framed several guidelines with the solemn objectives to achieve peace for the international community. The Declaration adopted a dynamic concept of peace which was based on the effective action and strengthening of respect for the principles of international relations. Peace does not mean freedom from violence but also "development and co-operation of all nations, large and small, mutual understanding and respect for the identity and diversity, resolution of mankind's worries, respect for the principles of sovereign equality and elimination of all pathologies in international life. Only such concept of peace is capable of engaging hearts and minds and can constitute the aim of educational processes" (Symonides, 1980, 235).

Following the UNESCO Constitution, the Preamble to the Declaration of the United Nations in 1978 stated "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" (qtd. in Symonides 1980, 237). The statement indicates that the genesis of war must be sought in the prejudices and distrust, false information, negative stereotypes and lack of understanding. In fact, the view that man's psyche is the source of war and man has an unbridled instinct for aggression had been traditionally supported by a large number of thinkers like St. Augustine, Martin Luther, Thomas Hobbes and Sigmund Freud. On the other hand, the modern research does not confirm the view about man's incurable instinct for aggression. But this is not tantamount to saying that man is incapable of aggression, violence and cruelty. The fact is human nature eludes generalisations. Aggressive behaviour does not originate from human nature but either is a product of education

or a response to a painful event. Individuals are to a great extent shaped by their environment and, under normal circumstances, prefer co-operation and normalcy to an atmosphere of competition, aggressiveness and violence. If properly trained and educated, they are capable of controlling themselves and the negative responses. Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge that man is capable of love, friendship, tolerance and that in the process of proper and systematic upbringing the finer sensibilities of man can be developed.

Peace Education in Schools

It is universally acknowledged that school is a major agent of socialisation. Daniel Bar-Tal and Yigal Rosen in their article "Peace Education in Societies Involved in Intractable Conflicts: Direct and Indirect Models" (2009) argue that education for peace can be most effective through school for the following reasons:

- Education in schools is sure to reach the whole society because schools are compulsory and all children are required to attend the schools.
- Schools are often the only the social institution that can formally and extensively achieve the objective of peace education as they have the authority, the resources, the methods, and conditions to carry it out.
- Schooling takes place during children's formative years, and the young children are least affected by the dominating ethos and are more open to new ideas and information.
- The young generation is required to learn the messages and information in schools and often treats them as truthful.

Although this observation is largely true, it should not be overlooked that the schools are the institutions that operate within certain social, cultural and material conditions. The objectives of peace education in schools will be achieved only when there all the factors will be effective simultaneously.

The education for peace demands that the school curriculum be designed to eliminate war and create a favourable climate for the perpetuation of the message of peace and harmony. School is a powerful agent in the transformation of cultural values that lead to the reconstruction of education for peace. While emphasizing the importance of school in education for peace, Carlton R. Deonanan remarks:

Since the school is the agent for the perpetuation of the cultural heritage, and an instrument for transforming the culture as well as for individual development, it is the responsibility of practising educators to give the highest priority to an education for peace, beginning with the elementary grades to the university. The social foundations of education approach education as a force in search of the redemption of man from social ills, the basis of which is to make man more peaceful and so more productive.

(Deonanan, 1971, 225)

The statement quoted above rightly brings to the fore the paramount importance of school as a social and cultural institute in the dissemination of cultural values for the peace and harmony. To achieve the objectives of education for peace the following measures may be adopted at the school:

- Education must be made free, universal and mandatory for the children.
- Education must provide the children hope for a meaningful and rewarding livelihood and life. The lack of educational opportunities is one of the factors to join terrorist and rebel groups in many countries.
- The content of the school curriculum should be related to life so that behavioural changes will be reflected in the learning-behaving relationship. Peace should not be considered to be simply an academic discourse but must be made an integral part of practical life.
- School curriculum should be conducive to the growth of a cooperative community. School must encourage cooperative learning to teach the children the values of co-operation, mutual trust, mutual respect, and interdependence.
- School must teach the children how to make difficult decisions and resolve conflicts constructively.
- Peace will not sustain without the strong moral, civic and ethical values of the members of the society. As school attendance for the children is mandatory, the effects of education can reach the entire society.
- Education for peace socializes the young children in such a way that facilitates the process of reconciliation and the development of a culture.

These are some of the crucial measures necessary for the fruitfulness of the education for peace.

Child-Centric Education

Involvement of the children to the process of peace-building is necessary to make the effort successful and effective. Education for peace is, as Sissel Volan observes: teaching children to understand the reality of our interdependent, yet still un-co-operative world, and to create a set of attitudes which enables them to cope with this reality. Attitude-building is of course a long-term task, and one could therefore say that peace education has to be a process rather than an isolated exercise. Most basic attitudes are shaped in early childhood. Peace education should consequently form an integrated part of a child's upbringing *in* school as well as *out* of school. (Italics in original; Volan 1981, 215)

Education in childhood is crucially important as it is the formative period for 'attitude-building'. Attempts must be taken to develop positive attitudes among the children through proper education. They should be taught to respect for rights and opinions of other people. They must be trained to meet other cultures with an open mind and they must be taught to be free from ethnocentric prejudices. Co-operation, not competition, should be encouraged so that the children may develop healthy attitudes.

An important aspect of education for peace is to teach the children the lessons of good citizenship. The schools should educate the children the importance of effective social and political relationships. Curriculum of education must be shaped to teach the children good manners, civic duties and democratic values to mould the children into the good, responsible and sensible citizens.

To make the education of the children for peace a fruitful effort the contribution of mass media cannot be underestimated. Children are sensitive by nature and they are easily influenced by the mass media. Through T.V., films, books, comic strips, video games etc. violence is frequently glorified. Children, because of their immaturity, think that the use of violence is an acceptable method for making a success of life, which is an undoubtedly a wrong perception. So deglorifying the use of violence through mass media should be an important part of peace education. Violence should not be used as a means of entertainment.

Children should form an integral part in the process of peace-building. Their opinions are to be considered important and they can also contribute to the problem-solving and conflict-resolution.

Peaceful Coexistence among all People

The most important objective of education for peace is to ensure the peaceful coexistence of all nations and all men for the harmonious advancement of mankind. Curriculum should be designed to promote the lessons of co-operation rather than competition. John Dewey rightly emphasized that the good society is a cooperative society. Indeed, the school "must emphasize cooperation in preference to competition because it is the place of the school to help students to begin to think about other members of our society. If all men must learn to live together, there will be need for a world citizen perspective and a genuine effort to eliminate provincialism in education" (Deonanan, 1971, 224).

Education for the Promotion of the Ideals of International Peace and Understanding

Education for peace must aim at creation of conditions for the peaceful coexistence of the people and promotion of the ideals of international peace and understanding. While the aim of education should be the elimination of negative stereotypes and attitudes, pejorative images about other nations, the measures should be taken for strengthening the sense of friendship, respect for the values, diversity and welfare of other peoples. Racial hatred, religious and cultural prejudice, national or other discrimination, advocacy of war and violence must be discouraged in the education for peace. Education for peace must propagate the ideals of love, fellowship, harmony, justice, equality, and objectivity. Education should make people capable of respecting and understanding other people and other cultures.

Dissemination of Genuine Knowledge about the World

One of the major causes of conflicts is the misconception about other peoples and their cultures. Wrong perception leads to misjudgement and misunderstandings. So the aim of education for peace must be the dissemination of genuine knowledge about the world, its problems and the ways to their solution. Since peace is the supreme value of mankind, all measures should be adopted to develop an unbiased knowledge about different ways of living, adequate understanding of the world, values and effective actions. Effective measures for interactions and exchanges with diverse nations and cultures can help to lessen the possibilities of misinformation about other nations and cultures and can strengthen an atmosphere of co-operation and mutual interactions.

Education for Disarmament

Disarmament education is essentially an integral part of peace education and it is concerned with all aspects of arms race and disarmament. In order to make the disarmament process effective what is needed is the serious study of the horrors of war and the destructiveness of modern weapons. The Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, dedicated to disarmament, stated that education programmes in the fields of disarmament and peace "contribute to a better understanding of and acquaintance with the problems created by the arms race and the disarmament necessity, thus being able to play an effective part in the solving of this major problem of the contemporary world by creating an opinion favourable to the stopping of the arms race, to the reduction of arsenals of accumulated arms, to the systematic reduction of military expenditures and to moving on to disarmament" (qtd. in Năstase 1983, 396). Efforts must be made to deglorify violence at the individual, national and international level.

Value of Empirical Experience

Academic and theoretical knowledge about peace is not sufficient to guarantee peace in the practical world. What is needed is a coordination of theoretical knowledge and its praxis. William Eckhardt in the article "Bridging the Gap between Peace Action, Education and Research" argues quite convincingly the role of an activist in translating an idea into a reality:

Activists, in attacking established social structures, tend to generate an equal and opposite reaction from the power structure which they attack. This method often exposes the power structure in a way that more academic methods of research fail to do, thus making visible what otherwise might remain relatively invisible. In this manner, the activist often serves to make the social unconscious conscious even as the psychoanalyst serves to make the individual unconscious conscious. This process of raising consciousness would seem to be a vital part of the peacemaking process, without which the peacemaking process might not get off the ground. (Eckhardt, 1988a, 182)

The task of peace-making would not be complete without the active participation of the peace activists, who help to implement the idea of peace into reality. This is one of the reasons why the educationists have laid much emphasis on the intimate relationship between learning and behaving. One of the criterion of learning is that learning is a change of behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Peace and harmony among the nations is universally recognized as the paramount value for mankind. Despite serious engagement with the question of peace and harmony, the history of mankind shows that the wars, with their huge toll, had been recurring phenomena. Apart from war, poverty, starvation, colonialism, racial discrimination, disproportionate economic development between the developed and developing countries, etc. are the major impediments on the way of effective means of world peace and harmony. Peace is not just the absence of war, violence and conflict; it also means the fulfilment of all the basic human needs. The only reasonable and sensible solution to all these problems is the peaceful coexistence and co-operation among the nations for the harmonious growth and prosperity of mankind. Since peace cannot be achieved and maintained by acquisition, efforts must be made for the development of moral conscience of the international community for the sustenance of peace and betterment of international relations. Mass media have a crucial role in building an international conscience and in developing the favourable climate for international understanding and in countering the evil forces of war and conflicts. The effectiveness of the idea of education for peace depends largely on the participation and co-operation of international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. International laws prohibiting war must be implemented for the protection of the rights of the nations and human rights. The concerted efforts of all these can ensure the peace and harmony of the nations and mankind.

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