

# Role of Peace Education in Society and Yoga as an Element

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**Abstract – As contemporary life, in all its aspects, is getting more and more violent and conflict ridden, there is a growing concern for resolving conflicts and realising peace in day to day existence. This concern has expressed itself globally in experimenting with peace education. There is a growing realization in the world of education today that children should be educated in the art of peaceful living in order to ensure that the growing generation internalises the value of peace so that the emerging world order will be based on a culture of peace. As peace in society is a manifestation of peace within the human psyche, it is vital to nourish internal peace by adopting appropriate means. It has been pointed out by several practitioners that yoga is effective in generating internal peace.**

**Keyword: Yoga, Peace Education, Internal Peace, Society.**

## INTRODUCTION

We WITNESS AN emphasis on peace at the dawn of the new millennium. For example, the year 2000 was declared as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the period 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World by the U.N.O. Thus it is clear that peace and nonviolence have become a major concern of humanity. So the question 'what is peace' may be logically raised. Peace, of course, is understood differently by different people. For some it is the absence of war while for others it is abstaining from committing violence. The term 'peace' is often used to mean a condition of the absence of open violence or war. But surely there is more to peace than that. It should mean not only the absence of war, but also the absence of violence in all forms such as threat to life, social degradation, discrimination, oppression, exploitation, poverty, deprivation, injustice and so on. It is generally agreed that a culture of peace is an essential precondition for the all round development of human beings<sup>1</sup>. So the inculcation of the value of peace in the minds of the growing generation assumes greater significance. But if this goal is to be realized peace must become an integral part of education. That is why both peace education and education for peace are getting incorporated into today's educational programmes.

While studying the history of peace education, it could be seen that peace used to be an integral part of education in many cultures, both in the east and the west. However, with the introduction of (positivist) scientific education and consequent popularization of Western secularism, moral and human values

including peace were slowly discounted, discouraged and edited out of the school curricula. Under the new western scheme, education was to be made completely scientific by which it was meant that only scientifically verified or verifiable materials could be included in the curricula. Anything value based was dubbed as not empirically verifiable and so unscientific and therefore should be scrupulously excluded from the curricula of modern education. But with the witness of the horrors of the First and Second World Wars there was a re-awakening at least among a few educationists to the need for developing the humanistic side of education.

Peace education has antecedents in the history of Indian education as well<sup>3</sup>. It has been universally acknowledged that Indian culture has been committed to a profound tradition of peace and non-violence<sup>4</sup>. A true product of Indian culture, Mahatma Gandhi was one of the greatest proponents of the culture of peace and non-violence. Subsequently, by following the Gandhian principles of non-violence and peace India, as a nation state, has contributed substantially to world peace. But unfortunately, the western education system that independent India continued to follow did not provide any space for the component of peace in its curricula for decades.

## MEANING OF PEACE

'What is peace' is really complex and perplexing and there is no universally shared answer to it. Peace, of course, has both internal and external dimensions to it and hence a comprehensive answer should take cognizance of both these dimensions. One of the comprehensive answers is as follows: Peace is the

behaviour that encourages harmony in the way people talk, listen, and interact with each other and discourages actions to hurt, harm, or destroy each other. The internal dimension of peace has been emphasised in the preamble to the UNESCO constitution where it is stated that "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed"

We have to accept frankly the fact that we still lack a great deal of understanding of what peace really is. In order to gain a holistic view, peace can be classified under the following heads.

## POSITIVE PEACE AND NEGATIVE PEACE

Peace means not only the absence of open violence and war but the elimination of violence in all forms such as violent conflicts, threat to life, social degradation, discrimination, oppression, exploitation, poverty, deprivation, injustice and so on. Peace cannot become a reality as long as inherently violent social structures exist in society. This perspective naturally implies that peace is an external phenomenon, something out there. There is a different perspective which holds that peace is, predominantly, an inner factor. It would say: 'peace is within you'. It suggests that peace could and should be explained in positive terms. Presence of health, contentment and (economic) wellbeing.

### Inner Peace, Societal Peace and Cosmic Peace

**Inner Peace:** It indicates harmony and peace within oneself achieved through a proper integration of the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of the human personality which includes good health, and absence of inner conflicts, joy, sense of freedom etc.

**Societal Peace:** Interpersonal peace i.e., peace among fellow human beings, harmony arising from healthy human relationships at all levels, which includes reconciliation, resolution and transformation of conflicts, love, friendship, unity, mutual understanding, acceptance, co-operation, brotherhood, tolerance of differences, community-building, human rights, morality etc.

**Cosmic Peace or Peace with Nature:** achieving and maintaining harmony with our natural environment and mother earth.<sup>8</sup>

## DEFINITION OF PEACE EDUCATION

Defining peace education and peace educator is not easy since it is an evolving and dynamic field in education. Peace Education has been variously defined as conflict resolution training, human rights education, democracy education, etc. According to UNICEF, peace education 'refers to the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavioural changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflicts and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflicts peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal,

interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level'. The main focus of peace education is to minimize and eventually eliminate various forms of violence through consciousness-raising, vision and action of the educate. Thus peace education is primarily action oriented, promoting social and cultural change towards a non-violent, sustainable future. Through applying peace education and thus attempting to create the culture of peace, it has been observed that schools stand to make several discernible and even quantifiable gains.

## COMPONENTS OF PEACE BEHAVIOR

The ten basic components of peace behaviour which are regarded as some of the major declared objectives of peace education are:

- **Positive thinking** - It involves building a positive self-concept in oneself. Having a positive outlook helps a person to value himself and life in all forms.
- **Compassion:** - Being Compassionate means having empathetic qualities such as love, kindness, friendliness and doing no harm to others
- **Inner Peace:** - Inner Peace as a theme is concerned with resolution of one's own psychological conflicts and problems and discovering peace of mind. It includes ways of understanding the self and the process of thought, controlling emotions such as anger, art of soothing the mind etc.
- **Be your true self:** - The concept 'Be your true self' means the strength of the character to be honest and direct in expressing one's needs, feelings and thoughts without letting others down. The skills in such behaviour are necessary for resolving conflicts and effective social interaction.
- **Living together:** - People need to learn to work harmoniously in groups with others. The theme living together can accommodate such subtopics as sharing, mutual help, trust building, taking group responsibility, leading and following. Learning cooperation reduces egoistic competitive tendencies in human beings.
- **Think critically** - Critical thinking on the part of the citizens is a necessary feature of a democratic society. It involves analysis, syntheses, looking at the other sides of an issue, searching for alternatives and logical thinking.
- **Non-violent conflict resolution:** - It encompasses such skills Necessary for conflict resolution as conflict analyses, negotiation, active listening, mediation,

creative problem-solving and alternative solution seeking.

- **Respect for human dignity:** - Respect for human dignity is based on the concepts of human rights, duties and justice. It attempts to develop a consciousness that recognizes and respects one's own and others' rights.
- **Peace in community:** - Building peace in community means providing opportunities for its members to be open to social realities and understand people's problems and work with them.
- **Care for the planet:** - The health of the planet has direct and immediate influence on the destiny of mankind. Values like peace with nature, preservation of nature, appreciation and admiration of natural environment, reuse, repair, recycling natural resources, etc. are included in this theme.<sup>10</sup>

## IMPORTANCE OF YOGA

Peace education is more effective and meaningful when it is adapted to the social and cultural context and needs of a country. It should be enriched by its cultural and spiritual values together with the universal human values. Peace, as war, originates in the human mind and hence for peace to become a reality, one's mind must be peaceful; in other words there must be inner peace. Yoga is contributive to the achievement of inner calm and happiness. Yoga is a way of life - an art of righteous living or an integrated system for the benefit of the body, mind and inner spirit. The main credit for systematising Yoga in to a scientific system goes to Patanjali (circa 700 BC), whose magnum opus Yoga Sutra, is considered to be the most authentic text on the subject of yoga. The aim of Yoga is the attainment of the physical, mental and spiritual health. Patanjali has recommended eight stages of Yoga discipline. They are:

- Yamas- (internal purification through moral training preparatory to Yoga)
- Niyamas- (cleanliness, contentment, mortification, study and worship of God)
- Asanas- Physical postures or exercises
- Pranayama- ( Control of vital energy/ Breath control)
- Pratyahara- (Withdrawal of the senses/ making the mind introspective)
- Dharana- (Concentration of the mind)
- Dhyana- Meditation

- Samadhi- Attainment of the super conscious state

Persons practising Yoga are reported to have experienced tremendous inner changes leading to the strengthening of their personality in a substantially creative manner. Some of the mental health benefits said to have derived from Yoga are:

- Reduction of tension
- restoration of flexibility
- freeing the mind from mental disturbances
- Decrease in nervousness, irritability and confusion
- Avoids depression and mental fatigue
- Revive alertness, attention and willingness to tackle problems
- realize the self and understand issues around him/her
- increased self-knowledge
- Attain and maintain physical and mental health and relaxation.

It is said that Yoga helps in discovering one's own true self and of enjoying one's self as it is, leading to the realisation of true joy or ananda which is held to be the ultimate goal of life. The most important benefit an individual gains from the practice of Yoga is that she/he attains full command of her/his own self<sup>12</sup>. Today, when the world is engaged in a rat race of cut throat competition, Yoga with its message of universal love and compassion assumes a significant role. In order to create peace and harmony in the world we have first to discover or create this peace and harmony within individuals. Yoga enables us to do this journey of self discovery by empowering individuals physically, mentally and spiritually. The practice of Yoga helps to develop qualities like positive thinking, inner peace, compassion, skill for non violent conflict resolution, respect for the self and others etc. which are regarded as components of peace behaviour. In other words, the practice of Yoga helps in the harmonious development of the body, mind and spirit. Meditation, the seventh stage of Yoga, is considered as an effective tool for finding within oneself a peaceful oasis of relaxation and stress relief. Regular practice of asanas (yoga postures) helps to keep our body fit and strengthen the mind and gives it the tenacity to withstand pain and unhappiness stoically and with fortitude. In this way, it leads to the attainment of mental equilibrium and calmness. Pranayama regulates the breathing process through correct breathing technique<sup>13</sup>. This helps us put our life energy to creative use. It also helps in releasing tension and developing a relaxed

state of mind. As the practice of pranayama facilitates the flow of oxygen to our brain and keeps it at the optimum it becomes an aid to creative thinking. It improves mental clarity, alertness and ensures physical well being. Yoga-nidra, another posture, relaxes our entire physiological and psychological system, thus completely rejuvenating the body and the mind. As Peace Education aims at the physical, emotional, intellectual, and moral-spiritual development of children within the framework of a deeply rooted tradition of human values, and as the practice of Yoga has a proven track record of achieving the above goals, it is only logical to presume that a proper integration of the two would certainly help in creating a culture of peace.

## CONCLUSION

Peace education has been identified as the most pressing need of the time. In the present era of uncertainty and violence in the forms of terrorism, war, crimes, injustice, oppression and exploitation, 'peacefulness' in thought, word, and deed needs to be kept alive in human consciousness. A rediscovery and application of Gandhi's Law of Love or Nonviolence is undoubtedly the most effective means for achieving this. Adoption of a Gandhian approach to peace education would, in the long run, pave the way for ushering in an era of a culture of peace and nonviolence. Building a culture of peace is, of course, difficult to accomplish. We need more explicit inclusion of peace education in the present system of education for achieving this goal. Different ways of integrating peace into curriculum also must be adopted. Conscious and concerted efforts must be made to make our homes, schools, and all other institutions more peaceful and peace-oriented so that peace will become an abiding presence and experiential reality.

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