Peace Education for Conflict-Ridden North East India

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Abstract: Peace occupies an integral part in every harmonious social life and relations, which is characterised by respect, justice and goodwill. One cannot deny the fact that the attainment of peace in the society is a pre-condition to the attainment of well being and justice of every individual. Linked to peace, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an agent of the United Nations, is primarily responsible for the promotion of peace education in the world. The establishment of positive peace in conflict-ridden regions like North East India will be a challenging task. Nevertheless, the gravity of difficulties in resolving the conflicting issues or the complexity of the contesting demands does not mean the impossibility of the attainment of positive peace in conflict-ridden North East India. This paper attempts to understand the meaning of peace education. It claims that the most effective means for the establishment of lasting positive peace in the Northeastern region is the establishment and promotion of peace education in the region.
Keywords: Conflict, Indian Government, Insurgency, North East India, Peace, Peace Education

INTRODUCTION

"Peace and education are inseparable aspects of civilization. No civilization is truly progressive without education and no education system is truly civilizing unless it is based on the universal principles of peace" [1]. The teaching on peace is found in religious teachings of many major religions of the world including Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity among others. "Peace education arguably has a long history. If we view major world religions as striving to encourage co-operation and harmony, if only internally, then the propagation of these world religions serves as a form of peace education" [2]. However, peace as a field of academic study emerged only in the last few decades. In other words, peace education is an emerging field of study. Peace education is a continuous learning process through formal and informal education. Promotion of peace education can also be made through other level outside of educational system such as workplace, family setting and in other public spheres. Peace education helps us to identify the roots of violence, to present different strategies and options for responding to violence, and thus claim that peace education is an important means to avert violence.

With the end of the World War II, nations began to realise the destruction of war and began to look for other alternatives including peace education for resolving the interstate conflicts and wars. Peace study in the 1950s and 1960s was largely confined in the establishment of negative peace among the conflicting states or actors. In the following decades especially in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a shift of focus among the peace educators, scholars and peace activists on the study of peace from negative peace to positive peace. Some eminent scholars and writers who work on peace education are Johan Galtung, Arne Næss, Gene Sharp, and John Dewey to mention just a few.

The United Nations acknowledged, as cited in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the potential role of education in promoting peace at all level, regional, national and international. Article 26 of the declaration states: "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace" [3]. The UNESCO has regularly issued documents that affirmed their commitment on the importance of peace education. The UNESCO took an active role in the United Nations for the recognition of the "International Year for the Culture of Peace", and the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World". Some of the important declarations on peace education include - the

UNESCO's *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* of 1995, the United Nations General Assembly's *Follow-up to the United Nations Year of Tolerance* of 1996, and the United Nations General Assembly's *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace* of 1999.

One iconic person among the Indians for the Indians as well as for the whole world who propagated very strongly for the promotion of peace education was Mahatma Gandhi. His teaching on *Ahimsa* (non-violence), education, morality and spirituality are inherent in the concept of peace education. In India, the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) actively spearheaded a "campaign to introduce peace education in school across the country" [4]. It is also true to point out that the peace education programmes in India are numerous, but often highly dissimilar from one another. Srinivasan [5] rightly pointed out, "On paper, there is a supportive environment in place, with the active involvement of the education ministry, and various other institutes. However, organisations frequently face logistical issues…" It is noteworthy to mention that peace education involves a slow process of change, and its impact is not tangible and easily quantified [6].

DIMENSION OF PEACE

Peace, on the line of Johan Galtung, has two dimensions: negative peace and positive peace. In a sentence, negative peace means the absence of war or violent conflict, or the absence of manifest violence such as war; whereas, positive peace means absence of any forms of hostility and structural violence, presence of social or economic welfare and justice, and the adherence to the principles of equality and fairness in political relationships.

Negative peace may be obtained through various mechanisms of conflict resolution such as negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, adjudication, Track II Diplomacy, and dialogue among others. Contrariwise, positive peace can be obtained through - establishment of just and equitable society, good governance, protection and promotion of human rights including the right to participation in public decision-makings, socio-political and economic justice, and the creation of sustainable and ecological balance.

It would not be wrong to say that positive peace is one of the most effective means to do away the different forms of structural violence and cultural violence. Galtung wrote, "By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence… Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even

feel, right – or at least not wrong" [7]. Cabezudo observed, "Positive peace is when social justice has replaced structural violence. In contrast to negative peace, positive peace is not limited to the idea of getting rid of something, but includes the ideas of establishing something that is missing. While getting rid of structural violence or social injustice, positive peace implies the presence of social justice" [8]. We can say that both the positive peace and peace education are interrelated and intertwined. In the words of Baylis, "Peace education invariably linked to the concept of positive peace that is designed in such a way as to "alter attitudes regarding peace in the hope that this will stimulate changes in structure" [9].

MEANING OF PEACE EDUCATION

There is no consensus among the scholars, peace educators and writers on the meanings of peace education. Williams [10] wrote, "Peace education itself is a contested term, its conceptions, and thus its manifestations, are quite varied". According to Page, there are three levels of understanding peace education. "The primary concern of peace education is to prevent the suffering and wastage associated with warfare. A secondary concern is the linkage with cognate social concerns, such as reflected in development education, education for international understanding, human rights education, future education, inclusive education, education for social justice, and environmental education. A third level of peace education, dealing with self-understanding, self-fulfilment, and how we interact each other and our environment at personal level" [11]. Niens stated, "… peace education can be seen as an umbrella term that covers various approaches to promoting harmonious relations between individuals and groups not only in societies emerging from violent conflict but also in other societies for the prevention of such conflicts" [12].

Peace education aims at enhancing moral and ethical values that are required to deal with conflictual situations. Galtung stated, "Peace education should be seen as a way of achieving, individually and collectively, a higher level of consciousness, an awareness of social reality and solidarity in a joint learning community, not as a mechanism of social classification" [13]. For Chehimi, peace education "…can be regarded as an umbrella term that encompasses different educational programs aimed at promoting issues of equality and social justice, and providing a consistent framework of this broad understanding of peace education which allows its application to the range of political contexts that characterize societies" [14].

Andrzejewski [15] wrote, "Peace education is fundamental to justice and ecological well-being… Peace education is inextricably linked with human rights and justice for indigenous peoples and peoples of

color since White supremacy, ethnocentrism, and religious hegemony have provided the justification for wards of conquest, imperialism, and genocide."

There is a relation between peace education with human moral and spiritual values. At times, peace education is rooted on moral and spiritual foundation. Linked to this, Carter remarked, "The philosophical roots of peace education extend around the planet from spiritual traditions. Peace is a topic and behavioural goal across religions, regardless of whether or not such aims have been maintained by users of violence who have identified with particular religions" [16].

As peace education is a part of the larger framework aiming at transformative social change, we can promote peace education only in an atmosphere of non-violence. It gives importance on the transformation of both the societal structure and human consciousness. Harris stated, "Peace education attempts to draw out of people their natural desire to live in peace" [17]. Similar to this, Carter observed that the "central goal of peace educators is conversion of instruction that fails to proactively address violence" [18]. Hadjipavlou also observed that the "… goal of peace education is the engagement in nonviolent activities. This means developing a consciousness that violence is not the way to solve social or international conflicts and instead use the tools of dialogue, negotiations, confidence building through contracts, and so on" [19]. Peace education and violence do not go hand in hand. In this context, the concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) popularised by Mahatma Gandhi found its centrality in the study of peace education.

OBJECTIVES OF PEACE EDUCATION

Incisively, the Indira Gandhi National Open University had presented the objectives of peace education in one of its study materials of the programme, *Masters in Gandhi and Peace Studies*. The objectives of peace education are to appropriate individuals' intellectual and emotional development; to develop a sense of social responsibility and solidarity; to observe the principles of equality and fraternity towards all; to enable the individual to acquire a critical understanding of the problems; to create willingness for continuous learning; to accept and participate in free discussions; to take decisions on a rational basis; to appreciate the cultures of others; and to overcome obstacles towards promotion of peace [20].

CONTENT OF PEACE EDUCATION

There is no consensus among the scholars, writers and peace educators on the content of peace education. Galtung rightly pointed out that "everyone, however, must develop his/her own unique for at and formula; there is no standard to be adhered to, as that would be contrary to the whole idea of autonomy in peace education" [21]. A vivid discussion on the content of peace education is found in one of the extremely prolific articulations of Johan Galtung entitled *Form and Content of Peace Education*. He pointed out, "one way of approaching content derives from the five phases of a peace research project. Of course, there are divided opinions on these phases" [22]. Galtung's five phases of a peace research project are as follows:

- **Analysis:** There is a need of analysis of the contemporary world in order to describe "basic facts relevant to peace problems", and to point out the major trends of the existing scenario. It is also to theoretically present and explain relevant facts in this phase.
- **Goal-formulation**: We have to have a concrete and explicit idea of peace, which is why goal formulation is an indispensable part of peace education. In other words, a goal on the world peace that we would like to see has to be formulated in each peace research.
- **Critique:** Both data and values, which are made available in the first and second phases respectively, are to be present for any type of critique.
- **Proposal-making**: "Proposal-making" is a basic part of any peace education programme, and this is a phase to "get from the real world to the preferred world".
- **Action:** Discussion on the concrete action is a necessity, like a "search for new forms of peace education or participation in a practice-oriented organisation".

DEVELOPMENT OF PEACE EDUCATION

Different peace educators have different opinions or ideas regarded as necessary requirements for the development of peace education. Linked to this, Cabezudo and Haavelsrud [23] discuss on the development of peace education in their article entitled "*Rethinking Peace Education*". According to them [24], peace education as a transformative process requires the following criteria or qualifications:

- Collective vision of nonviolent and transformative development have to be constructed;
- Committed capable individual or collective leadership for the promotion of peace education has to be recognised and acknowledged;
- Constructive relations between actors committed to the educational process has to be developed;
- Institutional capacity has to be built in order to ensure that the public policy required by a peace education process is effective;

- Civic participation is a necessity in all the planning and in all the process of peace education; and
- Obtain the results through indicators that "reflect transformation towards nonviolent conditions, collective learning and changes within societies" where the educational process takes place.

CONFLICT-RIDDEN NORTH EAST INDIA

The Northeastern region of India consists of eight States: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The region has a land area of 2,62179 square kilometres, which is about 7.9 % of the total land area of India. It is "located between 89.46 degree to 97.30 degree East longitude and 21.57 degree to 29.30 degree North latitude, the region is linked to the mainland India by a tenuous 22 kilometre land corridor, a link that has come to be referred to as the 'Chicken's Neck', in the State of West Bengal [25]. The region shares 1643 kilometres international border with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal. According to 2011 census, the Northeastern region has a population of 455,87,982, which is approximately 3.77 % of the total population of India [26].

The North Eastern India is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in India as well as in the whole of South Asia. It is a home to numbers of ethnic groups, each having their own distinct tradition of art, culture, dance, music and ways of life. Many times, there are contestations and conflicts among the various ethnic conflicts in the region. The conflicts and contestations in the Northeastern region revolve around the issues of identity politics, ethnic conflict, right to self-determination, land alienation, illegal immigration, majority-minority conflicts, economic backwardness or underdevelopment, communal politics, and high rate of unemployment among others. Of all the issues in the region, the issue of insurgency receives the most attention. Development of the region is unlikely to speed up, unless the issue of insurgency in the region is resolved as there are many "parallel governments" run by the insurgent groups in many parts of the regions. The issues of the region have attracted the attention of numerous social scientists and writers, and have attempted for redressal of the issues through academic writings and by other channels. Of late, the so-called "mainland Indians" played and continues to play a "racial card" in some Indian metropolitan cities especially in Delhi, the Capital of India. Molestation, murder, rape or torture against the Northeasterners outside the North East region has become a serious concern, but the political apathy of the Indian politicians, bureaucrats and police personnel towards addressing such "racial problems" encourage the "racists" to continue playing a "racial card" in the Indian metropolitan cities.

The Centre for Development and Peace Studies noted, "Economic backwardness of the region and the resultant alienation has generated dissent in the region, which on occasions has translated into armed insurgencies against the Indian state. Such problems, being intertwined with issues such as identity politics and ethnicity, have entered into extremely complex arenas. Several such insurgencies exist in each of the northeastern states and have defied attempts by the government to solve them" [27]. The Indian Government especially under the Congress regime since the time of Jawaharlal Nehru has failed miserably in resolving the issue of insurgency in North East India. Reasons for their failure are many. The attempt of Indian Government to resolve the insurgency issue of the region with military powers is one of it. One other reason is the failure of the Indian government to recognise the complexity of the insurgent groups with different issues and demands, and the attempt to address such complexity with one uniform law. The most important reason for the failure of the Indian government in resolving the insurgency issue is the use of force as a means of countering insurgency groups against the civilians resorting to all forms of human rights violations. Today, there are more than 100 insurgent groups in North East India, both active and inactive insurgent groups. Assam and Manipur are the two most affected states by the insurgency movements in the region. Of all the States of the Northeastern region, Sikkim is the only State with no insurgency movement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the independence of India, the Government of India had attempted several times through various means to resolve the insurgency movements of the Northeastern region. Some were successful, while many others were not. The uses of various mechanisms of conflict resolution such as negotiation, mediation, dialogue etc. by the Government of India to resolve the insurgency movements in the regions have little successful story. The mushrooming of insurgency movements in North East India are not the problems, but the syndrome of the problems or the consequence of the problems. Some of the problems in the regions are the failure of the Government of India and the concerned States in curbing the illegal immigrant movements across the international borders, the failure to curb the politics of majority-minority conflicts or communal politics, the political apathy towards resolving identity and ethnic related issues, and the failure of the Indian Government and the concerned State government to resolve the problems of underdevelopment and unemployment. Many of such problems are related to the issues of structural violence and cultural violence. So long as the

problems above-mentioned are unresolved, the insurgent groups in the regions will continue functioning in and around the Northeastern region.

Hara [28] rightly pointed out, "… peace education needs to be promoted not solely by outside pressure or assistance but also by close and enthusiastic cooperation between local governments, teachers and people in order to assist peace education in bringing about the most durable and sustained positive impacts on peace". Issues and problems of the region cannot be resolved in the absence of people's participation of the region. No doubt, the Government of India should continue its diplomatic efforts to resolve the regional issues and problems. However, the more important point is that the Government of India as well as the State Governments of North East India should educate the Northeasterners through various peace education programmes. In other words, peace education in the region is a necessity in order to develop a sense of social responsibility and solidarity, to take decision on a rational basis, to allow civilian to participate in planning and decision making process, and to promote peace in the region in particular and the country in general. As mentioned earlier, peace education can act as a transformative process in conflict-ridden regions like the North East India. The "Helpline for the Northeasterners" for the security of the Northeastern people in some Indian metropolitan cities is unlikely to give security for the Northeasterners in a true sense of the term. The point is that a sense of appreciating the cultures of others or acknowledging the "otherness" comes from within and not from some external systems or forces. The incidence of discrimination against the Northeasterners in towns and cities continue to happen largely because of the lack of such appreciation or acknowledgement of others' culture or "otherness". Hadjipavlou [29] remarked, "Peace education can thus function as a healing platform for past mutual grievances and develop joint responsibility toward a shared future."

India was known for her adherence to the principle of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). One example to this was the Indian freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Today, in India, the ideas and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi or Gandhian Studies find relevance only in some institutions and universities. Dissemination of the culture of peace and peace education can be taken place through various channels. The most important being the educational institutions. Unfortunately, most of top Indian Universities have no Peace Studies as an academic study. In North East India, the Sikkim University has *Peace and Conflict Studies* as an independent discipline. Shapiro [30] questioned, "Where, we may ask, are the demands for a more intensive engagement with our students about violence in our society and in our world? Where is the curriculum that seeks to explore the pervasiveness for

creating more peaceful and non-antagonistic cultures? Where are the opportunities for young people to question the degree to which societies like ours invest such huge resources in the development of weapons of war and why there are so many people in our world engaged in military activities?"

The region needs more educational institutions committed to peace education in order to produce many committed capable individuals or collective leaderships for the promotion of peace and culture of peace in the region. One the one hand, the importance given to peace education will definitely produce efficient peace loving individuals and leaders. On the other hand, people at large will impart the knowledge of peace and the culture of peace. Carter pointed out, "Teachers facilitate the development of student's knowledge, skills, and dispositions that have been recognized as useful in preventing violence in response to conflict…. Recognizable as an outcome of instruction for such student competence has been their ability to prevent conflict, as well as proactively respond to it" [31]. Factually, peace education is not only a school matter. Thus, we should give importance to peace education in family life, governmental policies, societal and non-governmental activities, and in media including mass media and social media in order to heighten the awareness of peace and peace education among the people of the region. Peace education will be one of the most effective means to get the region rid of structural violence and cultural violence. In essence, peace education is necessity for the promotion of peace and for the attainment of positive peace in North East India.

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