

REPORT OF NATIONAL CONVENTION ON PEACE & SOCIAL HARMONY

A two days National Convention on Peace & Social Harmony was held on 11-12 September 2013 at Jayadev Bhawan, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. More than three hundred participants from all sections throughout the country attended the convention. The programme was coordinated by Manoj Jena, General Secretary of Vinoba Seva Pratisthan(VSP) and convenor of the national convention. The background, objectives, agenda, discussions and outcomes of the convention has explicitly follows.

INTRODUCTION:

Economic, social & technological changes around the world have lessened human misery and yet have also contributed to global and local conflicts in many areas. Globalisation has created an increasingly angry, alienated and frustrated population despite its contribution to wealth creation. The number of violent incident is also on the rise in the different parts of the world including South Asia. We have to explore avenues to combat such violence.

There are several causes that invite violent activities in our society. Among them poverty, inequality and exploitation stand out as three major factors.

The philosophy of Gandhi and Vinoba are more relevant now than in the past. Unless the basic humanity lying dormant in all of us is activated and released, the sympathy and empathy towards the deprived can't grow. In this context **Vinobaji had suggested that there should be explosion of love in all-human heart.** The outward material development will not be effective unless it is backed by true human development which means display of Values like truth, love, compassion, tolerance and brotherhood so that the society could derive actual benefit from material development.

Dealing with violence too requires change in human conduct. There are two types violence: one is individual violence and the other is collective violence. So far as individual violence is concerned it has already been restricted to human families and immediate neighborhood. Many people do not like to solve problems in their families by violence. They often stick to the tried & tested method of patience and persuasion in solving their domestic problems. But when social problems come before us, we tend to lose faith in non-violence. This creates a contradiction in human conduct. **Mahatma Gandhi held the view that social problems also could be solved through non-violent means. Vinoba went farther and advised to treat the society as your family and behave with members of the society just as you behave with the members of your family.** Then the spirit of fraternity and fellow feeling will spontaneously emerge in the society. This would enable societies to stand together against different forms of collective violence.

The growing discontent among the lower strata of society always jeopardizes internal peace of a country as we have observed in India. Internal peace and international peace are linked with each other. So we have to remove first the factors creating discontent in the society. The poor and the deprived should be enabled to enjoy their fundamental rights and liberties just as the privileged section of the society. The poor need affordable access to food, shelter education, employment, medical relief, leisure and above all justice & dignity. These factors have to be incorporated in our planning and should be given priority. **The poor tribal who are yet to derive any tangible benefit from development are feeling frustrated and are joining hands with violent outfits who use them in disturbing the peace and tranquility of our country.** Time has come to ponder over the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi and his great disciple Vinobaji. All planning and development programmes should be based on the collative will of the people and implemented by them as partners in development.

Violence in the present age has reached the point of saturation. **During the last ten years of the 20th century conflicts between countries killed 220,000 people and in 1990s about 3-6 million people died in wars within the states.** The super powers of the world are busy piling nuclear weapons of mass destruction in their own countries. The purpose is to attack, terrorize and destroy perceived enemies, competitors, adversaries and challengers in other countries. Now other nations are also joining this mad rush for mutual destruction.

Vinobaji had advised members of the nuclear club to defuse their nuclear weapons and throw them to the ocean for good. So long as one nation preserves weapons of mass destruction; world peace will be constantly under threat.

It is high time the nations having nuclear arsenal should boldly come forward and join the non-violent process for world peace.

In this context, the role of an effective and objective world body, like the UNO becomes increasingly crucial. If humanity is to survive, this body should emerge as an independent, proactive and the strong organization that human beings have ever created for self-protection and survival. However, the UNO also needs a Gandhi to keep its strong and weak members in reasonable symbiotic relationships –

- To reduce the distance between democracies and autocracies
- To ensure that development takes place in a level playing field
- Finally to end poverty and discrimination.

OBJECTIVES :

- ✓ To evaluate the challenges to Peace and Harmony in Pre and Post Globalization era.
- To critically analyze the present context in terms of domestic and global violence.
- ✓ To identify the causes and possible remedies for the problems that affects internal Peace.
- To analyze different aspects, dimensions, form & reasons for violence
- ✓ To explore Satyagraha as a common approach to bring in change in the strife-form world.
- ✓ Promote civil society initiatives for conflict transformation
- Cultivating self-reliance and self-rule through positive peace & social harmony.
- ✓ To suggest a roadmap and an action plan for durable Peace
- ✓ Empathetic dialogue process to resolve conflict between maoist and govt.
- ✓ How to rejuvenate volunteerism and humanism in the society

SUB THEMES AND SESSIONS:

1. Peace & social harmony: Retrospect ,Prospect & Challenges
2. Understanding internal conflicts & Role of Sarvodaya organisations
3. Sustainable Peace and Harmony: Role of Govt.
4. Peace Education in School : Role of Govt. & Civil Society Organizations
5. The role of youth in promoting Peace & Harmony in society
6. Challenges to peace and Harmony: Pre & Post Globalisation
7. Establishing Peace and Social Harmony: Need for a Cross Cultural & Interfaith understanding
8. Local action for promoting peace & harmony

SPEACHES OF GUEST & RESOUC E PERSONS:

AV SWAMY(MP)

“I was lucky to get the chance of meeting with Acharya Vinoba way back in 1955 and today, I feel it’s my rebirth on this day of his birth anniversary.” “Is today’s generation happy with all these developments? It’s a big no. Tribal people of Koraput district fought against the British only to get the rights over the land. But, even after the Independence, successive governments did not provide the land to the tribal people. That was the reason why the naxal movement began. Hence, I feel there is still relevance of the ideals of Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Mahatma Gandhi and today’s generation should realise it.”

Gandhi used to say “My life is my message”. You should be the role models at the village level for the realisation of Gram Swaraj. It is unfortunate that PESA could not be implemented. Government is passing the land acts without

consulting the people. It is being done in favour of the big corporate houses. Hence, you should take oath to get back the land.

MANIMALA (Director, Gandhi Smriti & Darshan Samiti, New Delhi)

“I was student when Acharya Vinoba started the movement. Then he had become a symbol of land movement.” “It’s my opinion that land should be under the feet of farmers who with their hard work can bring heaven to earth. Peasants should not be deprived of the land and their rights over the land in the name of industrialization or for any other reason.”

“It is sad that people are being deprived of their own land because of the ongoing industrialisation process in various places of Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattishgarh in other mineral resources states. And, at all these places peoples movements are active against the forcefully land acquisition.” Hence peaceful industrialization should be focused to avoid this unpleasant situation said Manimala.

BRAJA KISHORE TRIPATHY (Former Union Minister)

Peace and Non-Violence was there since time immemorial. It was confined with the spiritualism. But it was Gandhi who had experimented it as instruments against the British and succeeded.

More than 25 percent of the population of our country are landless. Gradually the agricultural lands are decreasing due to non-agricultural purpose. The government is passing the land acquisition bill only to provide the land to the industrialists and for that it is depriving the people of the land and their entitlement. If such things continue, then people will prefer to go in other way.

THEMATIC SESSION-I

‘PEACE & SOCIAL HARMONY: RETROSPECT, PROSPECT & CHALLENGES’

ACHARYA BHABANANDA

None has paid the attention in Odisha to the concept of peace and social harmony. Steps have not been taken to provide the land to the people till date. In the field of environment, no such tangible steps have been taken. The state is getting maximum foreign exchanges from the handicrafts yet the government is ignoring this sector. So it is high time that the government should give priority in the field of environment and take appropriate steps.

PADMA CHARAN NAYAK (Ex MLA)

This day should be observed as “NISHA NIBARANA DIBAS’ in order to maintain peace and social harmony in the society. Today, liquor and other types of intoxicants are breaking social harmony and creating trouble. So the govt. should give proper emphasis on banning of liquor.

PRAVIN PATEL (Director, Tribal Welfare Society, Chhatisgarh)

To-day we are discussing Peace & Harmony and challenges now and in the days to come in the light of the thoughts Gandhi and faithfully cultivated by Vinoba ji.

It is time to speak some hard truth. We are proud to be the biggest democracy of the world, thanks to Gandhi and scores of other freedom fighters who have made huge sacrifices and given us the freedom. Now after 66 years of our independence, we, the people of India are trapped in a situation which is far away from the thoughts of Gandhi.

Violence in the name of religion, caste and region has become a routine. Yesterday it was Gujarat in 2002 and today when 2014 elections are in sight we see naked dance of violence at Mujaffarnagar. We have lost the way shown by Gandhi and strongly and sincerely followed by Vinoba ji.

To day when there is strong need to have Gandhian philosophers & strong followers like Vinoba, we find only handful few who faithfully carry the torch of peace and harmony shown by Gandhi. Youth who born in Independent India hardly talk or even discuss about Gandhi & Vinoba except reading some lessons in text books at schools. Youth are the fulcrum of change but are mostly misguided who are carried away in glittering malls. If Gandhi and Vinoba are to come out of text books, we need to mould the youth which. is also a big challenge.

Vinoba walked across the length & breadth of the country for the benefit of landless farmers. But today, after crushing the Gramodhyog, lands of the farmers are forcibly acquired for large and Mega industrial and mining and dam projects even at the cost of bringing tears in the eyes of those poor farmers by crushing their democratic protests carried out in Gandhian style. As if we Kalinganagar was not enough, we see bravery of our police cracking down on the peaceful protestors at lower Suktel, Dhintia & Govindpur for POSCO, an overseas corporate giant. Under such circumstances how can we preach Gandhian lessons to those farmers whose democratic rights are hijacked every day and Gandhian protests are crushed with heavy hands.

Two decades of economic liberalization and globalization has already crushed the village economy. Corruption in rural employment guarantee program which is run in the name of Mahatma Gandhi has proved to be the biggest den of corruption.

Mockery of poor BPL families is made by none other than planning commission that whimsically draws poverty line with laughable statements that meals are available at Rs.1/-, or Rs. 5/-. Any body earning over Rs.27/- or after criticism, it becomes Rs. 32/- per day but they do speak a word when toilets of planning commission are renovated by spending about Rs.85 lakhs. This is seen as making mockery of poor who were closest to the heart of Gandhi & Vinoba.

Where is peace when due to malnutrition many children die including many even in the womb of mother. Female infanticide also kills many in the womb of their mothers.

We see many tribal areas of our country which have gone red with the blood of tribals. Mineral wealth which is beneath their soils have proved to be their biggest curse. Many mineral rich tribal areas have become hunting grounds where in operation Green Hunt, innocent tribals are killed by the state themselves. Thousands of innocent tribals are in jails as under trial prisoners for over two years. Situation is very serious but Government hides vital facts from its own people.

Our constituting speaks of economic, Social & Political justice but it remains only on papers. Today, income of 20 corporate houses equals to about 74 crore people of India. In the year 2018, we will have 27 crore unemployed educated youth. Will they listen to stay calm and suffer silently? No. The situation is just like that of sitting on dynamite that can burst any day in the years to come. This is the biggest challenge to peace and with poor quality of corrupt politicians, many with criminal background, harmony is also threatened.

ER. LALIT MOHAN PATNAIK (Working Chairman, Odisha Nagarika Samaj)

Violence is the biggest hurdle in the way of peace and social harmony. It breaks the social harmony and creating disturbance in the social sphere. Terrorism is one of the foremost causes of death in India. The number of deaths in India due to terrorism is more than the total deaths in the world. So, we should take steps to prevent terrorism in order to maintain peace in the world.

VB CHANDRASEKARAN (Mahatma Gandhi Ashram, Chhiti, Andhra Pradesh)

I am here to beg your cooperation so that I will work in Dandakaranya. We need at least 10 more Gandhis and Vinobas. We should work along with the naxals to bring peace in the region. The places of violence should be the places of peace and we should show this to the world.

S MUKHTAR AHMED (Human Rights Activist, West Bengal)

Peace is related to the land issues at present. At various places, land disputes and displacement issues are coming in the way of peace in the country. So we should give priority to the land matters in order maintain peace and harmony in the society.

THEMATIC SESSION - II

(PEACE EDUCATION IN SCHOOL: ROLE OF GOVT. & CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS)

PROF FANI BHUSAN DAS (IAS, Retd & Peace Activist)

Peace is science. Violence free development should be the outmost priority. Development without peace is meaningless. Indian society is the best in the world. We live in the reality whereas westerners are living in a state of illusion. So it should be better Indians should adopt the Indian values.

Peaceful environment is possible through the education. There is the need of a humanistic approach in education at school level. Peace education should be given 'from womb to tomb'. It is time that the schools introduce "Peace Education" and to begin with the schools can-

- 1) Develop a more humanistic approach with LOVE as an ingredient of Peace.
- 2) Improve human relations between, teacher-student, teacher-teacher, student-student, mutual respect.
- 3) Help develop good attitudes in students and teachers as well e.g co-operation, mutual respect.
- 4) Help healthy emotional and spiritual development in students.
- 5) Integrate IQ, EQ and SQ for holistic development of students enriching their wisdom.
- 6) Facilitate socialization through participation in interactive and co-operative learning activities.
- 7) Improve students' discipline and moral behaviour.
- 8) Develop creativity both in students and teachers.
- 9) Improve standard of quality of teaching by incorporating the principles of "Peace as Science"

BAISHNABA CHARAN PARIDA (MP)

Peace concept was there since the beginning of the human civilisation but it is the present political system that is coming in the way of peace in the society. "Today, there is no peace in villages. In the name of Panchayatiraj, divisions are being created in villages and society is being poisoned." Sarpanch candidates are spending lakhs of rupee in elections. Liquor is flooding in rural areas during the time of election. Is it Gram Swaraj? "Those who are talking of 'Basudhaiva Kutumbakam' are plundering the mines and minerals of the state. "We have to expose the evil power and Satyagrah is the only way." All should derive benefits of the development. Then only peace should prevail in the society.

BHABANI CHARAN PATNAIK (Ex MP & Freedom Fighter)

"To be a good man is most important in society. Don't think of doing any evil and harming others in any way. Be happy with the happiness of others and be sad with the sorrow of others." "We cannot derive any benefit from argument. It is hard work that matters most. We should think seriously how we could accomplish the task left undone by Acharya Vinoba and for this determination is required." Land should be provided to the people without any bloodshed which was the basic ideal of Vinoba.

THEMATIC SESSION-III

LOCAL ACTION FOR PROMOTING PEACE & SOCIAL HARMONY

RABI DAS (Senior Journalist)

Liquor is one of the reasons of breaking peace in rural society. Women should lead the movement to ban the liquor in village, because, within the last decade, there is widespread selling of liquor in the state. Women are afraid of going outdoors after the evening due to the problems created by drinkers. None of the political parties are taking any steps to maintain communal harmony. Is there any political party which is taking initiatives to create casteless society?

SUDARSAN DAS (Secretary, Human Development Foundation)

There is the need of addressing the economic disparity in the rural areas in order to bring peace. Initiatives should be taken to bring a social equilibrium. Our political system is responsible for the social disparity. So, people at the local level should take the lead. And for this, there should be brotherhood among the people and they should love each other for the interests of the community at large.

AKSHAY KUMAR (Founder, Navanirman Samiti)

Truth is the reflection of peace. Peace should prevail if people can refrain from wrong doings and prepare themselves mentally to create a social bondage. Here is a big difference between the literate and the illiterate. Local literate people have a pivotal role in the rural areas. Local actions require local personalities. Village level catalysts can bring a change in rural areas to maintain social harmony. They should work without any fear and favour.

ABASARA BEURIA (IFS,Retd & State Chairman, Sarvodaya International India)

There is the need of change at family level. Citizens' involvement in election process is most important to restrict the corrupt elements. Movement against liquor culture should be widespread. Awareness should be created among the people. Corruption should be checked at all levels.

DR. BIKASH DAS(President, Committee for Legal Aid to Poor)

A cadre based movement is required to bring peace in society. The government should be serious on various commissions and should act on their recommendations. Access to justice for the violence affected people should be given priority.

PROPOSALS OF THE PARTICIPANTS:

1. Communal violence must be curbed at any level.
2. Corruption must be checked
3. Ensure peaceful and fair election(Peoples involvement in electoral process to strengthen democracy)
4. Speedy & Access to justice for poor and violence affected person
5. Demand for banning to any obscene in media
6. Pre-marriage counselling for adolescent
7. Dialogue between Maoist and Govt. should be initiated
8. Liquor, particularly county-made liquor should be banned.
9. Untouchability should be curbed.
10. Gram Swaraj through participatory governance must be ensured
11. Promotion of Gandhian ideology through its constructive programme.

RESOLUTION

The national convention resolved to initiate a movement against liquor, to mediate between the Maoists and the government to find a solution for a durable peace, to fight against corruption at lower bureaucracy, to promote youth voluntarism and to advocate 'land to landless'.