

## PEACE STANDS AT THE DOOR, BUT WHO HOLDS THE KEY?

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### **Abstract**

It is usually neighbouring communities or countries that come into conflict with each other. It happens when there is a perception of one is exploiting the other. Movements of peoples, both internal and cross border, have often put communities in conflict. This problem has accentuated in the West since 2015. Sociologists say that societies with a high proportion of young people may face tensions if their energies are not guided in a positive direction. It happened in the colonial period and is recurring the Middle East and other areas these days. Growing economic inequality is another reason for tension as well as religious or racial hatred. Every citizen can do something to bring communities in conflict at the local level together and help them to look forward to a shared future. An “intelligent evaluation” of even a world problem can win global attention and contribute to the cause of peace.

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### **Futility of Victory**

The Trojan War lasted ten years, but the winning Greeks gained little. Ajax fell in war, Menelaus and Odysseus kept wandering,

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Agamemnon was killed after return.<sup>1</sup> Kurukshetra war lasted only eighteen days but wiped out entire races. The winners were in no mood for rejoicing. A grief-stricken Yudhishtira goes to Gandhari, the Kauravas' mother, and seeks forgiveness. He asks her to curse him. Surrounded by dead bodies and rotting corpses, he tells Arjuna that he wants to spend the rest of his life as a wandering ascetic. What stands out clearly in both cases is the *hollowness of victory*.<sup>2</sup> Ashoka, having defeated the Kalingas at the cost of a hundred thousand lives, felt 'remorse' for the disaster he had caused. Victory meant nothing to the winner.<sup>3</sup> Jesus describes the fall of Jerusalem in the most stirring terms. Apart from the fact that it was made to point to the end of human history, it could also have been a reminder to overconfident zealots about the futility of violence (Lk 21:24). Put the sword in its own place, Jesus says, he who takes the sword also perishes by the sword (Mt 26:52).

Historian Ernest Renan was sure that it was the over-aggressiveness of Louis XIV and Napoleon that made France decline in later years.<sup>4</sup> In the First World War, the British lost 20,000 men at the battle of Somme *in a single day*. At the World Trade Centre, 2996 Americans were killed within *one hour*. In World War II, 100,000 Japanese lives were wiped out *in an instant* in Hiroshima. In the entire War, over 50 million perished to no one's benefit.<sup>5</sup> Each an apocalyptic story by itself.

What happened to Europe as a result of two suicidal wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be assessed objectively only by later historians; but if a continent that had controlled 84% world space was reduced to dependency on its junior partner, America, it becomes evident that the wars had helped neither the winners nor the losers. Violence is suicide, as Mahatma Gandhi said. No wonder Cicero would exclaim, "I prefer the most unjustest peace to the justest war that was ever waged" (Letters to Atticus).

### **Causes of Conflict**

It is generally neighbouring nations that come into conflict whether they be Athenians and Spartans, Romans and Carthaginians, or French and Germans. Most conflicts begin at the local level with

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<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, London: Granta Books, 2003, 1.

<sup>2</sup>Gurucharan Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good*, New Delhi: Allen Lane (Penguin), 2009, 234-236.

<sup>3</sup>Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good*, 243.

<sup>4</sup>Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, London: Granta Books, 2003, 20.

<sup>5</sup>Jared Diamond, *The World Until Yesterday*, New York: Viking, 2012, 127.

minor provocations on either side. The same is true of small communities in the neighbourhood. When communities emerge from relative isolation or underdevelopment, there is a period of uncertainty. Neighbouring communities feel that their *identities* have to be defined and *affirmed*, and relationships with other ethnic groups sorted out. There are other reasons too, like claims over land, rights over markets, or monopolies over specific goods.

Similarly, communities that may have had the advantage of early education or a specialized skill which has become a part of their heritage, are quick in taking up *financially rewarding activities*. For instance, some are good in the cultivation of certain cash crops and grow rich, others have developed business skills and begin to prosper, others have built up a knack for political manoeuvring and capture power. These communities may be perceived as exploiting others, or may actually be doing so. Those who feel left behind build up grievances.

Such tensions are built on perceptions of economic or political exploitation of one group by another, usually a stronger one. Minority communities like the Catalans or Welsh feel marginalized in their eagerness to preserve a minimum of *political power* in reference to the majority community, or with the stronger ethnic group in the neighbourhood. Their discontentment manifests itself in various forms of protests. Here again, there may be truth in the allegations, but there are times too when minority *leaders keep alive* their *discontent* in order to retain the political loyalty of their communities. Occasionally there is a third party, not excluding the state machinery, that fans these inter-community tensions for their own political or ethnic interests. This often happens before elections. Gradually, the two communities' inability to get along smoothly and "work" together becomes "evident" (FT 7).

Further, in many parts of Asia and Africa, migrations to each others' areas during the colonial period, or in recent times in search of jobs to Europe or America, have created community-relationship problems, giving rise to situations of inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, inter-religious conflicts. Self-assertion of the so-called '*sons of the soil*' in many places has been growing stronger every day. In this respect, we must admit that the rights of the indigenous people must surely be respected. But the human rights of migrants cannot be ignored. If in such situations, an atmosphere of *reciprocity* can be built up and the neighbouring communities can be made to understand that their needs and skills are complementary, and neighbouring nations that their ambitions can be put in mutually stimulating relationships, the

chances of conflict can be greatly reduced. But such a development will largely depend on the *far-sightedness of leaders* and of alert citizens on either side who are able to make their community see that people of other cultures are not ‘enemies’, but collaborators in life’s common venture (FT 147).

Pope Francis, when dealing with this theme in *Fratelli Tutti*, generally refers to the migration trends from Asia and Africa to Europe, which have aroused mounting opposition from Right Wing parties in the EU. The Pope keeps insisting that the world belong to everyone (FT 125), and that peace can be ensured only on the basis of “shared responsibility in the whole human family” (FT 127). He laments the “*xenophobic mentality*” that has arisen recently among people (FT 39), and foresees that migrations are going to play “a pivotal role in the future of our world” (FT 40). In other words, this inter-mixing of people of diverse cultures, social habits, and religious faiths, is only going to intensify in this globalized world.

### **Youth Energies in Expansion**

Sociologists see youth bulge as one of the causes aggravating an inflammatory situation. They point out that a society with a *high proportion of young people* is likely to have youth energies that can collide if they are not guided in a positive direction. Responsible leaders in society seek to tap this resource of human energy, which is called a ‘demographic dividend’ today, through effective planning. Unfortunately, populist leaders, who wish to adopt a confrontational style to preserve their leadership position, find it easier to take advantage of such young people, especially when these themselves are labouring under problems of poverty, *land shortage, unemployment, job competition and unfairness*. They instigate the belligerent instincts of youth with “fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate” (FT 45).

Pankaj Mishra seeks to explain colonial expansion itself as an expression of the population explosion in the western world in an earlier era, with “the frustration of *disoriented youth*” playing a big part in it. He says that even Alexis de Tocqueville felt compelled to suggest a French empire in North Africa.<sup>6</sup> Cecil Rhodes put it this way, “He who would avoid civil war must be an imperialist.” He was referring to the internal restlessness in Europe that led to the *scramble for Asia and Africa*, mass migration of people, violence, and anarchy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger*, London: Penguin Books, 2017, 2.

<sup>7</sup>Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 3.

Turbulent British youth, eager for heroism or plunder moved to the colonies. French youth eager for adventure looked to Napoleon for heroic deeds. Byron went to fight in Greece, others joined the Spanish Civil War, others moved to South America for “poorly understood causes.”<sup>8</sup> The Italian writer Gabriele D’Annunzio who has been described as an opportunistic prophet of angry misfits in a deeply unequal Europe, gave expression to this anger in this way, “We want to glorify war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive act of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas for which one dies.”<sup>9</sup>

### Young People Are to Be Guided

This will enable us to understand today some of the violent happenings in the Middle East exploding with youth energy, that also spurs a search for ‘living space’ (*lebensraum*) through *migrations*.<sup>10</sup> Niall Ferguson calls it “youth bubble” (Newsweek 28.11.11). Saudi Arabia alone has grown from 3.2 million to 22 million in a few decades. And when we know that there are over 300 million people in 22 Arab countries in a similar situation we are able to place matters in context.<sup>11</sup> The echoes of their frustrations are heard worldwide: *suicide bombings* in Xinjiang or Nigeria, insurgencies in Yemen or Afghanistan, massacres in Paris, Tunisia, Florida, Dhaka, Nice; insurgency, drug trade, urban violence, and terrorism.<sup>12</sup> It is similar “simmering reservoirs of cynicism, boredom and discontent” that Right Wing political leaders in Turkey, India, America, or France turn to their own political ends.<sup>13</sup> Not that wealth-accumulating corporates do not ‘instrumentalize’ the same youthful energies for *profit-making* with little concern about the rupture they cause to their personal lives, undermining their bonds with traditional social codes, cultural assets and human securities.

Over 3% of the population of the world today are living in another country than theirs, and over 60% of the migrants are living in the developed world.<sup>14</sup> People, of course, have always been moving to new places. *Conquering races* like the Germanic tribes, Mongols or

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<sup>8</sup>Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 22.

<sup>9</sup>Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Taj Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2014, 21.

<sup>11</sup>Hans Küng, *Dialogue with Islam, Islam, Past, Present and Future*, Oxford: One Word, 2007, 467-468.

<sup>12</sup>Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 5.

<sup>13</sup>Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 8.

<sup>14</sup>Milena Santerini, *Intercultura*, Brescia: Editrice La Scuola, 2003, 51.

Turks who moved forward under adventurous leaders were under population pressure too and received the best support from their needier members who were willing to risk everything to make their fortune in a distant land. Modern *immigrants and refugees* likewise are in search of better livelihood, no matter what the risk. These new arrivals create a sense of insecurity among the *poorer sections* of the host communities, who too are in search of rewarding jobs. Young people on either side, when in despair, place themselves under *radical leadership* to push their cause.

There are other ways of looking at this youth dynamism than what we have described above. Every society sets itself moving in new directions and breaking new ground with the assistance of their younger members. Thus, *young people* in a society are not just trouble-makers or rebels who need to be disciplined and tamed. The protests they make against the social rigidities of the past or abominable exploitation they experience in a profit-driven society cannot be ignored. Their *perceptions and insights* are priceless, grievances real. The activities they initiate and movements they launch on natural instinct bring dynamism to a stagnating society. *Their prophetic message*, often hastily translated into action, needs to be interpreted and occasionally modified, not outright rejected. Their talents are to be developed through creative styles of education and their energies channelled through well-planned *human resource development* programmes. It would be a great loss if they moved away to other lands seeing little scope where they are, or in search of another atmosphere. It is when the adult society fails to play a constructive role in their trouble-time that young people launch themselves into reckless ventures and adopt unpredictable ways.

### **Weapons Trade Complicates All Rational Approach to Solvable Problems**

The tragedy in such situations is that there are money-makers who want to turn social discontent and *youth anger to their own benefit*. Let us look at the marketing styles that the National Rifles Association of America used to promote their sales. What their agents used to do was to 'seduce' the younger generation to assert themselves as persons of weight with the possession of a gun.<sup>15</sup> The gun business employed story tellers and script-writers to write thrilling gun stories reporting "*one killing every paragraph*." Out of those novels was to emerge fabulous figures like Buffalo Bill, Billy and Kid, Calamity

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<sup>15</sup>Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America*, New York: Basic Books (Perseus Group), 2016, xviii-xix.

Jane, and others.<sup>16</sup> The use of the guns seemed an adventure and millions of guns continued to be sold. Rush W. Dozier argues that even in current times sensational crime stories in the media influence vulnerable people:<sup>17</sup> horror films, serial killings,<sup>18</sup> violent video games,<sup>19</sup> even toys in aggressive postures.<sup>20</sup> As of now, America has about 300 million guns in circulation,<sup>21</sup> being the cause of about 30,000 deaths a year.<sup>22</sup>

A certain Hiram Maxim is supposed to have been advised by a friend in Vienna in 1884: "If you want to make a pile of money, invent something that will enable these Europeans to cut each other's throats with greater facility."<sup>23</sup> The only difference today is that the scene of action has changed to the Middle East and elsewhere, but the *weapons producers* remain the *beneficiaries*. Andrew Feinstein exposes the deep involvement of "defence companies, arms dealers, banks... drug runners, bent politicians, intelligence agents, government officials, ex-Nazis, militant Islamists" in arms sales that lead to violence.<sup>24</sup>

After World War I, the peace negotiators who met at Paris were unanimous that peace could be ensured in future only if arms manufacturers were brought under discipline.<sup>25</sup> In this they failed. Dwight Eisenhower had feared that if *arms producers* were too *close to the Government*, the resulting mutual dependence would be disastrous. George W. Bush had no such hesitations. He had thirty arms executives in senior positions in his administration, who greatly controlled his economic and foreign policy plans.<sup>26</sup> Arms trade represents 40% of all shady deals in world trade today. 'National security' is quoted to silence all criticisms.<sup>27</sup>

### **Near Helplessness When National Economies Become Dependent on Arms Trade**

It is extremely hard to bring this issue to the public fora, because the biggest arms exporters are advanced countries whose economies

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<sup>16</sup>Haag, *The Gunning of America*, 189.

<sup>17</sup>Rush W. Dozier, *Why We Hate*, New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing, 2002, 215.

<sup>18</sup>Dozier, *Why We Hate*, 216.

<sup>19</sup>Dozier, *Why We Hate*, 217.

<sup>20</sup>Dozier, *Why We Hate*, 221.

<sup>21</sup>Haag, *The Gunning of America*, xiii.

<sup>22</sup>Philip Cook & Kristin Goss, *The Gun Debate*, Oxford University Press, 2014, 34.

<sup>23</sup>Haag, *The Gunning of America*, 36.

<sup>24</sup>Andrew Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, London: Penguin Books, 2012, xviii.

<sup>25</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 7.

<sup>26</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, xxvi.

<sup>27</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, xxv.

have become greatly dependent of this income. *Governments* themselves are compelled to *close an eye* to the shady dealings of commercial agents with armed militias, insurgent groups, terrorists, totalitarian states; bankers, money launderers; and dealers “selling to all sides.”<sup>28</sup>

During World War II, the American economy had become heavily dependent on War requirements. Arms production grew eightfold between 1941 and 1943.<sup>29</sup> Then came the Cold War and War on Terror. Though we have more data available here about American transactions, Germany, France, Russia and other countries never hesitated to supply arms to questionable purchasers in the Middle East, like Saddam Hussein.<sup>30</sup> From there, arms found their way to Rwanda before the genocide which killed 800,000 people;<sup>31</sup> to Congo, Sudan, and Israel,<sup>32</sup> to Angola, Somalia, Egypt, Libya, Zimbabwe and Ivory Coast, just before serious conflicts in these countries.<sup>33</sup> The War on Terror in Iraq-Afghanistan would cost \$4 trillion,<sup>34</sup> \$6 trillion according to Trump. Arms dealers have a *vested interest that conflicts continue* and that conflicts zones expand! Pope Francis has been strong in his criticism of people who prosper on arms trade. Citizens should demand greater accountability from their government about their control of the arms trade.

### **Violence Invites More Violence, War on Terror Creates More Terror**

The fact, of course, is that arms-producing nations always need an enemy. With the decline of Communism, Hans Küng says, America needed to find another hostile force to justify their rearmament, and they found that in Islam.<sup>35</sup> For the indigenous people of the Middle East, however, this interference in their internal affairs by an outside force was a *humiliating experience*, especially as it grew harsher and harsher. Taj Hashmi argues that when a community feels singularly wronged and humiliated, they discover hidden strength in themselves; every new blow adds to their strength. In an asymmetrical war, the weak feel justified to strike back in unexpected places and in unexpected ways.<sup>36</sup> The desperate look for *desperate remedies*.

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<sup>28</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>29</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 237.

<sup>30</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 400.

<sup>31</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 98.

<sup>32</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 344.

<sup>33</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 436.

<sup>34</sup>Feinstein, *The Shadow World*, 428.

<sup>35</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, xxiv.

<sup>36</sup>Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, 20.



If the 9/11 Twin Tower strike carried away the lives of 3000 innocent persons, the 'War on Terror' in Iraq took away at least *half a million lives*, clearly more than Hiroshima and Nagasaki put together.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, many so-called religious warriors are often brain-washed young recruits, unemployed youth, least instructed in true Islamic teaching. But Islam serves as a binding force for them across nationalities, ethnicities, political loyalties, and sectarian interests. Combatants are *ready to die for Islam*, especially when the Prophet is insulted or the Quran is dishonoured.

We cannot ignore milder versions of the same aggressiveness happening in India in another direction, especially beginning with the destruction of the Babri Masjid: like the activities of *cow vigilantes*, anti-Romeo squads, religious warriors and moral police...with anti-minority vocabulary and anti-Dalit aggressiveness; appropriation of tribal lands.

### **Dialogue of Communities/Nations/Cultures/Civilizations/Religions**

Conflict is not caused by genuine religious fervour or legitimate nationalism. It is caused by the exaggerations of conceited leaders who make use of nationalism or religious fervour for their own interest. Hans Küng proposes that struggles between nations and religious communities be replaced by a dialogue of nations/religions/civilizations.<sup>38</sup> If concerned people take *moderate positions*, make balanced statements, and show deference to the point of view of the dialogue partner, a listening attitude can be created. Jesus reduced his teaching to the simple formula, 'love one another.' Buddha called for the Middle Path. Aristotle defined virtue as the middle way (*via media*). Muhammad himself seems to have taught "The best thing is in your midst."<sup>39</sup> A "*pedagogy of peace-making*" can be developed from these core teachings.<sup>40</sup>

Within the Islamic world itself there have been several moderate voices. Mahathir bin Mohammad of Malaysia, referring to the Arab-Israeli conflict, threw out a challenge in this manner, "The Jews survived 2000 years of pogroms not by hitting back, but by *thinking*." He asked his co-religionists to develop a modern outlook.<sup>41</sup> And Avraham Burg, a Jewish Master echoed, "The Jewish people did not survive for two millennia in order to pioneer new weaponry,

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<sup>37</sup>Hashmi, *Global Jihad and America*, 23.

<sup>38</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, xxiv.

<sup>39</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 364.

<sup>40</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 603-604.

<sup>41</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 267-268.

computer security programmes or antimissile missiles. We are supposed to be a *light unto the nations*. In this we have failed.”<sup>42</sup> With such open-mindedness a Hindu-Muslim dialogue would also be possible, and Christian dialogue with different religions, as Pope Francis has shown.

It is good to notice that South-East Asia was never conquered by Muslim rulers. Islam was introduced there by merchants, Sufis, and teachers of the law, as also into South India. Hence the peaceful relationships that Muslims there have preserved with other communities there.<sup>43</sup> This makes it clear that *Islam* by its nature is *not violence-prone*. Historically, at the height of its political and intellectual glory in earlier centuries, Islam was more tolerant than Europe and welcomed diversity of thought.

What Hans Küng sees is the possibility of *mutual correction* among religions, enrichment, demolition of prejudices, strengthening of one’s own credibility.<sup>44</sup> He feels that the religious fervour that Islam manifests today is a powerful witness in a world that considered secularisation irreversible.<sup>45</sup> If ISIS is eager to unite the Islamic world under a Caliphate and western geo-politics wishes to keep it divided, what Küng suggests for the Middle East is some sort of *regional alliance* like EU, ASEAN, or MERCOSUR.<sup>46</sup>

### Colours Can Combine

If inter-religious clashes have been increasing in some parts of the world, colour differences have caused equally painful incidents in the United States. Isabel Wilkerson’s recent book *Caste* describes the situation, comparing it with the caste-system in India, and showing how things have turned for the *worse for the African-Americans* in recent years. Matters took a bad turn from 2008 when a projection was made that White Americans would no more be the majority in the US by 2042. The election of Barack Obama as the President coming soon after that gave a jolt to many in the dominant community.<sup>47</sup> Instances of violence against African-Americans increased.<sup>48</sup> Emotions ran high. Those who were aware of this situation were least surprised when a person like Trump was elected

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<sup>42</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 479.

<sup>43</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 405.

<sup>44</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 488.

<sup>45</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 539.

<sup>46</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 482.

<sup>47</sup>Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2020, 6.

<sup>48</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 8.

in 2016.<sup>49</sup> The case of violence against George Floyd was just one of the many instances of harshness against African-Americans.

Historically, *group-lynching* of African-Americans grew popular, because, being a collective activity, no individual could be identified as criminal.<sup>50</sup> The same style has been adopted in India by VHP cow-protectors, morality-imposers and crusaders against love Jihad. Wilkerson shows how any effort of the African-Americans to upgrade themselves was resisted: they could not 'act big,'<sup>51</sup> look smart,<sup>52</sup> own a better car or build a better house,<sup>53</sup> bathe in pools and lakes.<sup>54</sup> They could not look at their bosses in the eye,<sup>55</sup> were *discouraged from education*. In Indian tradition, a Dalit was warned that his tongue would be cut off and molten lead poured into his ears, if he tried to read and write.<sup>56</sup> The parallels are amazing. What pains Wilkerson is that there is *no remorse* in America about this evident unfairness, while Germany repented for their racism,<sup>57</sup> and paid restitution to the survivors of Holocaust.<sup>58</sup> Self-criticism can show the way.

### Gross Inequality Leads to Violence

If race, religion, and colour differences can create tension among people, sharp economic differences seem to be calculated to stir more trouble in a world of *mounting inequality*. Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Prize winner, says, there are two ways to get rich: create wealth, or take it away from others!<sup>59</sup> Liberal capitalism has adopted the second way. Thomas Piketty in his exhaustive study *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* cautions against a possible return of the 19<sup>th</sup> century level of gross inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Marx developed his theories to respond to workers' helplessness caught in stagnating wages while big property owners accumulated wealth.<sup>60</sup> According to Piketty, the Marxist principle of *infinite accumulation* remains a danger in the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 180.

<sup>50</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 192.

<sup>51</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 163.

<sup>52</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 155.

<sup>53</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 56.

<sup>54</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 117.

<sup>55</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 58.

<sup>56</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 144-145.

<sup>57</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 346.

<sup>58</sup>Wilkerson, *Caste*, 347.

<sup>59</sup>Stiglitz, 32.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Harvard: The Belknap Press, 2014, 8.

century and can lead to violence.<sup>61</sup> He points to gross imbalances like top managers setting their own remuneration with no limit, even without any relation to their contribution to productivity and profit.<sup>62</sup>

Capitalism manipulates wants, advertisers exploit insatiability. Thus, it has constructed a cultural order built on motives of greed and acquisitiveness, with the consequence that it has *polarised society* between the very rich and the very poor.<sup>63</sup> The biggest danger Piketty sees is that of the possibility of rich countries coming to be owned by their own billionaires, and the world by the world's billionaires.<sup>64</sup> The right steps to prevent this endless inegalitarian spiral that Piketty suggests are *progressive capital tax* and a high level of international financial transparency.<sup>65</sup> Difficult as these are likely to be, they are still required if we wish to prevent *redistribution by force* of arms.<sup>66</sup> If some such measure is not adopted in the right time, anger is bound to rise, and violence is bound to come as Pope Francis says (EG 59).

### **A Peacemaker Needs to Unlearn Skills of Confrontation**

In a world of inequalities, imbalances, and injustices, it is no surprise that philosophies of struggle sprang up in different periods of history. If Nietzsche's theories encouraged the ambitious, Darwin's justified the audacious, and Marx's motivated the victims. Their theories took political forms in Fascism, Nazism, Communism, exaggerated nationalism, ethnic radicalism, and religious fanaticism. The younger generations that have grown up with these messages have been inspired by the *ideals of fighting* and struggling for justice and rights, that their combating spirit has grown, and their reconciling skills have sagged. No wonder, then, that the fighter is the hero today. What makes news is action, confrontation, and destruction. What is expected of a committed activist is to condemn, denounce, expose, challenge, and humiliate.

Consequently, we are beginning to forget that there have always been certain skills traditional in all cultures, like paying respectful attention to the other person's/community's point of view, trying to understand them, showing sympathy for the opponent's goal, explaining oneself humbly, avoiding aggressive language, and

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<sup>61</sup>Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 10.

<sup>62</sup>Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 24.

<sup>63</sup>Robert Skidelsky & Edward, *How Much is Enough?* London: Penguin Books, 2013, 5.

<sup>64</sup>Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 463.

<sup>65</sup>Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 515.

<sup>66</sup>Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, 538.

*making an effort to convince; yielding, forgiving, eliciting compliance, evoking collaboration, insisting on gentler solutions, and inviting a compromise. So, the first thing a would-be peacemaker needs to do is to unlearn some of the skills of confrontation and develop the skills needed for reconciliation.*

All theories of struggle have spoken about 'oppressors and the oppressed' so that inexperienced peace-makers come to the field to decide who is right and who wrong, and how far wrong. So it comes as a surprise to them that in most cases of conflict both contenders are fully convinced that they are fighting for a good cause. Both are waging a war on behalf of fairness to their community and its interests. *Both are fighting for justice*, each community for its own version of it. Thus, perceptions of justice clash. This will call for a new understanding of justice itself as Amartya Sen contends in his *The Idea of Justice* which should emerge from the interaction of diverse points of view. In fact, the main thrust of this paper is to emphasize the importance of making a determined effort to *understand a problem in the complexity of its context*, with its aggravating details, reasons, motives, goals.

The following section now will seek to show that every sincere *citizen can make a contribution* to global peace effort, beginning from his/her immediate context. It also seeks to draw some lessons from the experiences of the Ecumenical Peace Team in Northeast India that had been actively involved in peace work for a quarter of a century, easing tensions in about ten inter-ethnic conflicts, some of which carried away hundreds of lives and destroyed thousands of houses, though they won too little national attention.

### **Share the Pain of the Parties Concerned**

Empathizing with the parties concerned is the beginning of a peace effort. Even if the peacemakers believe that the claims of the contending parties are exaggerated, unless they are touched by the *love they have for their people* and the sense of justice in the way they understand it, they will not be able even to initiate a dialogue. They should be able to "understand," if not approve, the excesses to which their "legitimate anger" had driven them. Neither group is asking that they say much, but FEEL much. They are not asking them to appropriate their anger, but experience their pain in the situation in which they are.

And be sure, there is a profound longing for peace even in the heart of the sternest combatant. Even the fiercest fighters are looking forward to an era of peace. Therefore, the most important thing for

the peacemakers is to make an acceptable presence in the subconscious of the warring groups. If they or their organization is well known for their beneficent services and non-controversial activities, the belligerents may welcome them when they take the initiative. Their ability, therefore, to build up *confidence-generating relationships* with the parties concerned is the key to their success. A commitment to humanity that comes through in their words, deeds and relationships can have a convincing power. A universal outlook, a sensitivity to human pain no matter who suffers, a keen desire to come to the assistance of people in anxiety...these are some of the qualities that people who wish to become peacemakers need to cultivate.

### **Helping People to Look Ahead Together**

In actual negotiations, it is better that the peacemakers continue to remain *confidence-builders* and *facilitators*, and help to create a serene atmosphere than anything else. People with diverse grievances, interests and points of view must have a chance to express themselves. The peace-making team may suggest a realistic step forward at key moments and invite deeper reflection, allowing the contestants themselves to thrash out their differences. The less they interfere with the *natural flow of interactions* the better. What is demanded of them, then, is a certain amount of self-emptying and finding themselves in the others (FT 88). Winning headlines may be flattering, but the fruits therefrom may not be lasting. Premature publicity can be fatal. What is important is to keep their attention focused on central issues in order to “penetrate to the heart of matters” (FT 50).

What is most important is to show neighbours in conflict how closely knit their destinies are. An invitation to plan their future together as a single family and as fellow travellers who “dream together” will be more fruitful in the long term (FT 8) than fault-finding. It is far better to *keep looking ahead together* (FT 10) than looking back in anger to assign blame. The former approach brings healing and leads to forgiveness; the latter would merely revive negative memories. If the concluding proposals are carefully phrased, well balanced and correspond to realities, needs and expectations, they usually meet with wide acceptance.

### **Opposition and Failures Should not Discourage Peacemakers**

There may be non-acceptance as well. Some persons in the communities in conflict may be seriously opposed to a peace-

settlement. A section of the public may be suspicious of the peace-initiators' motivations. Petty-minded officers may be jealous. Political parties may have other interests. Groups opposed to the activities of the Peace Team may be critical. There may be *negative interpretations* in the press. There may be repeated failures in the peace work itself. And cynicism against the peacemakers may grow.

The Peace Team's very non-resistance to various allegations may bring about a reversal of the trend. Then, all of a sudden, quite unexpectedly the truth reveals itself. "Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope" (FT 55). For, despite all the quoted weaknesses, at depth there is *some measure of goodwill in everyone*. People who wish to be peacemakers keep seeking to tap that measure of goodwill. They do not turn cynical, but try to rescue people from their own inconsistencies. They are committed to their fellow beings and determined to "seek the best for their lives" (FT 94). Pope Francis says, there is "no one solution, no single acceptable methodology" in such initiatives (FT 165).

### **'Culture-Translators' and 'Ambassadors' between Emotionally Wounded Religious Groups**

It is extremely interesting that the Harappa civilization that existed for 700 years at the earliest stage of Indian history gives no evidence of serious conflicts. Weapons found there were mostly against animals. Strong bondedness in cultural loyalty must have ensured uniformity in common script, weights and measures.<sup>67</sup> It must have been a tribal society where a *collective leadership* exercised *co-responsibility*.

Centuries later, in the Vaishali Republic (Sanga) among the Licchavis, where, it was said, "Each one thinks I am king", there were 7,707 rajas and more uparajas<sup>68</sup> ... which really meant *persons who felt 'responsible'* for the community. The Sangas remained unassailable as long as they were united.<sup>69</sup> Buddha and Ashoka came from such tribal communities where a sense of *solidarity and co-responsibility* was strong. This pattern being very much in the Indian tradition, then, it should be possible for a network of committed citizens in each region to create an atmosphere of harmony and build up a sense of togetherness and "*co-responsibility*" among communities in conflict in a common effort to shape their future (FT 77),

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<sup>67</sup>Upinder Singh, *A History of Early and Medieval India*, Noida: Pearson, 2010, 176.

<sup>68</sup>Singh, *A History of Early and Medieval India*, 267.

<sup>69</sup>Singh, *A History of Early and Medieval India*, 268.

In an intercultural world we need bridge-builders and *culture-translators*, who will interpret not only meanings but also FEELINGS of one community/group/aggrieved party to another. Martha Nussbaum has emphasized the importance of understanding and handling collective psychological attitudes or *group-emotions* in a society in times of crisis.<sup>70</sup> In attending to them, rather than become judgemental, one should give every aggrieved group a hearing, and help reduce their anger. *Anger-reduction* is a mission by itself. Even justice-fighters must remember that confrontation that seeks to remain always confrontational is not helpful. Social or political criticism that assiduously searches for answers along with the rest of society offers hope. When doors open to solutions, anger comes down. It is for this reason that Paul says, let us not leave people in anger, lest they be led into wrongdoing (Eph 4:26).

Alvin Toffler says, as we have ambassadors today between nations, future *ambassadors* will have to be between *religious groups*, professionals, regional or cultural groups.<sup>71</sup> Indian civilization respects diverse mental orientations. *Brahmajala Sutta* refers to 62 different philosophical views that interacted in ancient India. Debates could turn 'fierce', but everyone had a chance to win a hearing.<sup>72</sup> Those who *understood others' views best*, made the biggest contribution. Listening is central. Historian Oswald Spengler says, it is not for no reason that Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt 11:15).<sup>73</sup>

### Who Holds the Key?

In situations of tension, every conscientious citizen who takes initiative holds the key to a solution. We need today people who can combine creative and critical thinking with sensitivity and a sense of solidarity. What conscientious citizens should seek to do is to plant *self-questioning habits* and motivating reasons in the heart of a society, which will keep challenging its unbalanced structures and unfair situations and prompt reordering them at every stage. An *intelligent evaluation* of the knottiest problem in the world can prove as powerful as the infinitesimally small elementary matter that ignited the Big Bang. It can shake the world. Every citizen who is active in the neighbourhood, vocal in clubs and associations, effective in the

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<sup>70</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Alvin Toffler, *Power Shift*, London: Bantam Books, 1992, 440.

<sup>72</sup> Singh, *A History of Early and Medieval India*, 301.

<sup>73</sup> Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Oxford University Press, 1991, 177.



press, enthusiastic on his/her social network, and at the same time self-critical to himself is going to achieve nothing less. He/she will shake the world.

One thing is important to emphasize: a leader alone is not everything in society. In democracy, followers make the leader.<sup>74</sup> It is collective thinking that prevails, even though the leader gives the most powerful utterance to it. Therefore, the least person in rank counts. Those who will make the greatest difference are the *most 'perceptive' thinkers* and the *most 'sensitive' decision-makers*. While we admit that violence has harassed the human race from the days of Cain, accommodation to colliding interests also were worked out from the earliest times that we know. Abraham said to Lot, "Choose any part of the land you want. You go one way, and I'll go the other" (Gen 13:9). Abraham was not the loser by conceding to Lot, he became the father of many nations (Gen 17:4).

However, humanity has failed too. People of all religions, cultures, ideologies have failed, despite their high ideals. The hardest thing on earth is to bring healing to historic memories. But an attempt can be made. John Paul II apologized to the Orthodox Church for the sack of Constantinople in 1204, to the Arabs for the crusades.<sup>75</sup> Japanese Prime Ministers have apologized to China and Korea; Tony Blair did the same to Ireland for the Irish famine. Barack Obama and Shinzo Abe visited Hiroshima to cry together "Never again." Emmanuel Macron asked pardon of Rwanda over the genocide.

The best way to continue this process of healing relationships would be to cultivate a determined effort to know each other's ideals and values and build on them.<sup>76</sup> When we begin to re-capture the spirit of our ancient civilizations and religious traditions, express it in today's vocabulary, and live them out in dynamic ways and relevant styles, we shall appreciate the core message it holds for us, "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth" (Cor 13:4-6).

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<sup>74</sup>Barbara Kellerman, *Followership*, Harvard Business Press, Boston, 2008, xxi.

<sup>75</sup>Dozier, *Why We Hate*, 272.

<sup>76</sup>Küng, *Dialogue with Islam*, 550.