

# Struggle for Peace:

## Complementary Models in the Context of India

Peace experience as a source of blessedness and a fountain of happiness is deeply embedded in all the great religious literature, both philosophic and devotional. The hymns of Vedas are replete with the tripple benediction: "Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti". The religious philosophies of Stoicism and Platonism were evidently efforts to go to the source of an "imperturbable peace". Likewise Confucianism was also permeated with the ideals of "calm". Not much different were goals set by Taoism and Buddhism. Needless to refer to the Semetic religions. Not only did Judaism introduce the word *Shalom* (peace) as a word of greetings, but also the prophets look forward to establishment of perfect peace in society, with the coming of the Messiah, "the prince of Peace". The very birth of Jesus Christ was hailed by Angels as an event of giving peace to men of good-will. And he himself blessed the peace-makers as children of God. Again, the recurring theme of all his apparitions after Resurrection was imparting of peace only. As regards Islam its very name indicates peace. *Salam* is itself a version of *Shalom*. In fact, it was so named because it was supposed to bring about the peace-experience among the various religions, races, colours and communities.

However, the understanding of the peace-experience is not the same in every religion. It varies in various degrees in different religions or even in the same religion. This paper is an attempt to describe the principal models of peace-experience prevalent in the Indian context. For the sake of convenience they are explained in the four sections of the paper. The final section sums up the findings, showing the complementary nature of the models discussed.

### I. THE POPULAR TYPE OF PEACE-EXPERIENCE

It is a matter of common experience among the followers of all religions that they take to certain rites and ceremonies, or certain

devotional practices in times of crisis. The end-result of all their efforts is an experience of peace and solace in life, or strengthening of heart to face life and accept hardships. Numerous are instances of people who struggle to find, and who actually find peace through popular devotions. A few of the typical cases may be mentioned. A good and loving couple, married for long, did not have any issue at all! They made a vow to pay a visit to a shrine in a pilgrim-centre. And they regularly visited the shrine once a year! By making that vow, they were able to face life, which looked meaningless without a child. To another couple a child was born, but premature and underweight. Not only that, he developed many a complication all through his infancy. The parents consulted a number of specialists. They tried their level best to give him adequate medical treatment. But to no avail. Finally they placed all their trust solely on the Almighty, and resigned themselves to His plan. Prayers and penance began to feature more prominently in their life. They were able to obtain the desired peace in their family which was not possible otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

I have seen school children, just before entering the examination hall, going to a place of worship. They pray fervently for light, and then are able to take their examinations with composure and confidence. A boy, feeble-bodied as he was, could not dare to stir out of doors at night. Darkness was such a terror to him. He was also fearful of ghosts, thieves and serpents. But his nurse suggested to him one day that recitation of *Ramanama* could be a remedy for his fear.<sup>2</sup> The boy had such a great faith in her that he took to it immediately. The result was phenomenal. He could remove his multiple fears in such a way that he could later in his life go even to places of communal riots all alone, that too in the darkness of nights and finding peace everywhere.

In India, the economically poor, the sick, the disappointed and the disillusioned, are not usually a threat to the society. For, they have certain common and concrete ways of getting reconciled to their problems and find a place for themselves in the society in which they

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1. Cf. A Pushparajan, "Do visits to Shrines help us?" in *Mirror*, Vol. XX No 6, April 1981, pp. 42-45.
  2. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, I.X (The Roman letters indicate the number of Part and Chapter respectively).

live. Pilgrimage to holy places is one of the commonest of ways to experience peace. The great ancestors of the land had established Rameshwaram in the South, Jaganath in the East, Dwaraka in the West, and Haridwar in the North, as places of pilgrimages. They knew very well that worship of God could be performed at homes also. For, it is the very same people who taught that those whose hearts aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their own hearts. But still certain far-off places were fixed as places of pilgrimage. And it was encouraged that the northens would travel to far South to see the Lord Rama. And people from South would go to the far North to take a dip in Ganges. They would travel on foot or bullock-carts to reach the place of pilgrimage. And they did it in great number and with great eagerness. It is all because it offered a peace-experience to them as well as to the society.<sup>3</sup>

Local pilgrimages are no less important. People often pay a visit to various temples within the State, walking up the whole distance and many a time, taking recourse to a mendicant way of life. All these hardships, which the devotees are able to take up willingly, discipline their soul, which in turn gives them a great peace. With the peace of soul they derive from their pilgrimage, they, on their return, are able to get on well in the society, with full security, solace and tranquility, despite their problems, disappointments, fears and dangers. The lakhs of devotees thronging at the shrines like those of Lord Venkateswara, at Tirupathy in Andhra Pradesh, testify to the validity of the peace-experience which the devotees are able to get through such devotions. Often they need to stand for days together in the serpentine queue, without proper food or rest, unmindful of scorching heat of the day and the biting cold of the night. All these form part of their struggles to obtain the desired peace through a *darshan* of the Lord.

Devotions to Swami Ayappa is increasing in leaps and bounds. It may seem a paradox to many that in these days of modernity, the devotees go about clad in black or blue dress, with forehead smeared

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3. The peace of the society referred to here may be equated with the spirit of national integration. People have claimed that such a peace has been inculcated by many a nation-wide pilgrimage. See M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1938) Reprint 1962, p. 46.

with *vibhudhi*, sandlepaste and *kumkum*. They abstain from all non-vegetarian food for forty days. They also keep away from all marital relations. At the end of the period they take up an arduous journey in the forested hills of Sabarimala, in Kerala, that too in the chilly months of November-January. It is all to surrender themselves to the Lord Ayyappa and thereby to get his blessings abundantly and live peacefully. The ever-increasing growth of devotion to Lord Muruga and Vinayaga in the South, Lord Shanmuga and Ganapathi in the North, and to many other deities like Hanuman in different parts of the country, point to the search of the modern Hindu to find peace in the religious ethos of his culture.

Struggle to get peace through popular devotions is not a feature of Hinduism alone. It is equally prevalent among the Christians also. Most of the faithful who assist at the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist do it not so much as an expression of their deep faith than as a means of getting relief from their stresses and anxieties of life. The fasts many Christians observe on Tuesdays in honour of St. Antony are mostly in gratitude of or in expectations of favours like recovery of lost articles through the intercession of St. Antony. Likewise are the devotions to Sts. Joseph, Jude, Sebastin, George. The ever-increasing number of devotees in the famous shrines like those of Our Lady of Health in Veilankanni, India, is another confirmation of the peace-experience people enjoy by these devotional practices. It is beyond one's imagination that in such a westernized city like Bombay, people of all walks of life, of all ages, and of different levels of sophistications queue up in St. Michael's Church at Mahim, and a long way outside it, from morning till evening, on all Wednesdays. Such weekly novenas are catching up in all the parishes of India. Almost every parish conducts the novenas on Wednesdays or Saturdays, after duly erecting the picture of our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

Seeking peace-experience through prayers at shrines is not limited to India alone. There are renowned shrines all over the world as that of Our Lady of Lourdes in France, and of Fatima in Portugal. There are certain "Shrine-Auditoriums" where Miracle Services are conducted once a month regularly.

The purpose in alluding to the variety of devotional practices in the different religions and countries is only to press home the point

that they are all indicative of the ordinary people's struggle to obtain peace and that it is a universal struggle in the whole of humankind. It is quite likely that some will dub such ways of peace-experience as superstitious practices of the weak-minded, the rustic, the illiterate and the pre-scientific minded people. It is not within the scope of this paper to counter such opinions. It may be mentioned, although that faith provides its own support and does not depend very much on argumentation and sophistication, that the popular devotional practices are genuine source of peace to many people like the disabled and the diseased, the invalids and the disappointed, the timids and the agitated. They help people to live with their problems and thereby provide them with a peace-experience which may not be possible otherwise. The popular devotions, when undertaken sincerely, bring about in the devotees an appropriate frame of mind that we do not owe everything to ourselves and that we should be able to learn to accept the bad as well as the good with a spirit of resignation. This frame of mind, in turn brings about a state of peace and equanimity which one may not get otherwise.

This position may be established by analysing the situation involved in a particular instance. Let us take a case of a man who meets with an accident.<sup>4</sup> His right leg is so crushed that it is to be amputated. With the advanced techniques of modern medicine, he may be perfectly cured of the physical wound. But, he has to face the psychological problem of a man with an amputated leg. He is no more the same person he was before. Whatever artificial adjuncts are attached to him in order to patch up the loss, they are only additions, after all. He has a new situation to face in life. He has to live a new life altogether. How is he going to live with the altered situation? This is a much more acute problem to him than the cure of a physical wound. No advance in medical science or modern technology could offer a solution to this problem! In such situations people turn to religions for solace.

It may be argued that the problem, mentioned above, may be solved by taking him to a professional counsellor, or even to a psychiatrist. Or it may be suggested that such psychological devices like auto-suggestion will help him to adjust himself with the new situation of life. But it must be borne in mind that to live with the problem

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4. The account here is based on the article cited in foot-note 1.

“religiously” means that one lives with it not merely for a day or two, or even for a sizable period of time, but that he learns to live with it throughout his life, and that too, he lives with it along with lasting peace of mind, heart and soul. Again, to have peace-experience religiously means to be at peace not only with oneself, but also with others, the whole society around, and even with nature itself. The popular practices in religions have helped people to develop such a peace-experience. And they remain to be upheld even during these days of modernity. This is not a plea for ignoring the superstitions which have grown with the popular religious practices. But one’s eagerness to do away with superstitions and excrescences should not lead one to do away with religious peace-experience itself!

## II. PEACE-EXPERIENCE IN THE INDIAN RELIGIONS

It is a fundamental experience of man to realize at some time or other in his life that there is an incurable dissatisfaction with the things of the world, a sense of non-fulfilment and emptiness in all the pleasures of this world. Every great religion has emphatically affirmed the finiteness of the finite, the transiency of the transitory. The very essence of a religion consists in awakening men to consciousness of the uncertainty of worldly things, and in initiating him to struggle for attaining a real and permanent joy and peace.

However, the specifically Indian Religions<sup>5</sup> have insisted on the illusory character of the finite, and on the need of “liberation” of the spirit so much in their philosophical literature that it has come to be their distinctive characteristic. By liberation was meant the “deliverance” of the immortal human soul from the “bondage” of body. Each human action (*karma*) is bound to yield retribution, good or bad, according to the nature of the act. The retribution is not necessarily to exhaust in a single life, but is sure to continue through a succession of existence (*samsara*). So, the only way for the immortal soul for its liberation is to cut away all its link with bodily life, to transcend space and time, and never to necessitate a reunion with body.<sup>6</sup> Now

5. The three religions which arose out of the Indian Soil, viz. Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism.
6. Here I have tried to state the complex doctrine of *Karma* and Rebirth in absolutely simple terms. For an authentic and more comprehensive treatment of the doctrine by a modern author, see, S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life* (George Allen & Unwin, 1932, 4th Impression, 1951,) pp. 262-311.

the only way for such a de-linking process is to act without emotion or desire, and thus to remove from one's actions all moral character, and the need of retribution, as well as the development of further *karma* and *samsara*.<sup>7</sup> Thus the liberation of soul from all bodily connection is ultimately the true source of peace and happiness. But more immediately and psychologically, the individual will be established in the state of pacifying indifference (*upseka*) on which nothing has an effect any more. This also constitutes real happiness and peace, here and now. Peace-experience obtainable at both the ultimate and the immediate realms was the essential core of all the Indian religions: Buddhism, Jainism and classical Hinduism.

It is Buddhism particularly which considered the secret of deliverance to lie radically and exclusively in the attitude of acting without any desire or attachment. Not only did it give an elaborate philosophical base to its core, but also develop it into a rigorous monastic way of life. It prescribed for a lay man the five prohibitions which restrain man's five basic desires of the animal order: 1) to take life of another living being, 2) to take what is not given him, 3) to practise unchastity, 4) to lie, and 5) to take intoxicating drinks. For a monk, five more prohibitions are added to the list. Prohibitions from dancing, singing or playing music, 2) from adorning oneself with garlands or oil, 3) from the use of lofty and luxurious resting places or bedding, 4) from accepting gold or silver, and 5) from taking food after midday.<sup>8</sup> Around these ten precepts (*Dasasikkapadani*) were woven 250 rules for the monks and 500 rules for nuns. Thus, emerged the Buddhistic monasticism. The aim of all this was to discipline the individual, to reduce and eventually to destroy all our desires and thereby develop in us the "enlightenment" or *bhodhi*. The attainment of enlightenment meant cessation of all desires and attachment or *Nirvana*. That, in turn, meant achievement of the real and eternal peace.

The classical schools of Hinduism also stressed with great force that real peace consists in interior liberation. They claim that the

7. Cf. J. Masson, "Buddhism and Salvation", in *Religions*, Secretariat For Non-Christians, Rome, 1970, p. 161.

8. The list of the ten rules is given differently in different texts. For more details about the actual differences and nuances, see Richard A. Gard, Ed. *Buddhism*, (Washington Square Press, New York, 1962), 2nd printing 1967, pp. 128-130.

9. J. Masson, *op. cit.* pp. 164-165.

eternal self or soul is now immersed in what is alien to it, or is clothed in an alien garment of flesh. This state of being is called a state of *avidya* because the soul forgets its true nature and identifies itself with what is not its. That indeed is the root cause of all troubles in the sphere of action (*karma*) and the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*). However, human being possesses a power more interior than intellect by which he becomes aware of the 'reality', and not merely in its superficial or outward aspects.<sup>10</sup> By gradual training he should free himself from the influences of speculative intellect as well as from pure impressions. When that happens, the soul will realise the eternal essence, "I am Brahman". It is this realization that is called knowledge (*jnana*). This knowledge of Brahman is not discursive but intuitive and experiential. It means freely and truly becoming and partaking of the essence of Brahman, becoming one with Brahman. To become one with Brahman means to be free from any outside influence likely to cause fear or sorrow. The obstacles to self-realization are the stresses of the personal will. They can be overcome only by replacement of the selfish will by one that is personal and universalized. This stage is *vidya*. And *vidya* is *Moksha*, attainment of perfect peace!

The endeavour of religion is precisely to train the self in overcoming the obstacles to the 'knowledge', and in restoring the lost unity between *Atman* and *Brahman*. It is really a progressive attempt at self-realization. It involves a struggle in which the empirical ego is slowly lifted into the transcendental plane, mind-in-its-immediacy into mind-in-its-ideal-perfection. The struggle itself means many things: a strict ethical discipline, cultivation of the intellect, emotion and will through prayer and contemplation, self-mastery and self-renunciation. The end-result of the struggle is an integral experience in which feelings are fused into one another, ideas are melted into one another, past and present fade away in a sense of timeless being. Thought and reality, consciousness and being coalesce and a creative merging of subject and object results, the privacy of the individual self is broken into, and invaded by the universal self which the individual feels as his own. The tension of normal life disappears, giving rise to inward peace, power and joy. It is this feeling of calm and confidence, even in the midst of outward pain and defeat, the experience of joy and strength even

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10. For an elaborate analysis of the power of intuition, see, S. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.* pp. 127-174.



amidst loss and frustration is what is connoted by the Hindu term: *Shanti*.<sup>11</sup> It is an experience which is profoundly satisfying and in which darkness is turned into light, sadness into joy, despair into assurance!

The celestial song, *Bhagavad Gita*, also presents the same sort of peace experience as referred to above. When asked for the description of the man who has such a wisdom as to make him unshaken and stable in spirit, the blessed Lord gives a long list of characteristics, comprising of 19 verses (II.54-72). This account incidentally explains also the peace-experience of the Hindu Tradition. When a man puts away all the desires and loves that dwell in his mind (55); when the mind is untroubled in the midst of sorrows and is freed from longings for pleasures and is free from passion, fear and rage (56); when he is without affection on any side; when he does not rejoice or loathe as he obtains good or evil (57); when he draws away the sense from the objects of sense, on every side (58); when he renounces even the taste for the objects of sense (59); and, when he has to move among the objects of senses, his senses are under control and free from attachment and aversion (64); then, he is said to be established in the peace of steadfastness (65). On the contrary, when a man dwells his mind on the objects of senses, attachment to them is produced; from attachment springs desire; and from desire comes anger (62). From anger arises bewilderment; from bewilderment, loss of memory; from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence; and when the destruction of intelligence happens he is lost (63). For the uncontrolled there is neither intelligence nor concentration. And in him who has no concentration, there is no peace and happiness (66). The final two verses of the passage sums up the whole account beautifully:<sup>12</sup>

“He unto whom all desires enter as waters into the sea, which, though ever being filled is ever motionless, attains to peace and not he who hugs his desires”(70).

“He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of mineness or egotism, he attains to peace” (71).

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11. The description here is largely based on S. Radhakrishnan, *op. cit* p. 93.
  12. The citation here is taken from S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad-gita*, (Blackie & Sons, Sixth Indian Reprint, 1977), p. 128.

Peace experience in the Hindu Tradition was not to remain confined to the classical description only. It was manifestly evident in the practices of *Sanyasin*, the wanderers. The stage called *Sanyasa* is actually a culmination of the four stages of man in Hinduism or what is known as *Asrama Dharma*. This stage does not mean that the individual frees himself from the cares of outward life, but he attains a state of spiritual freedom when he is not tempted by riches or honour of the world. Nor is he elated by success, or depressed by failure. On the contrary, he develops a spirit of equanimity. He does not insult any one but rather bears patiently the insults. He has no personal attachment or private ambitions. He belongs to no particular family or community. He is ever free.<sup>13</sup> In other words, he has sought a peace-experience which is far above and different from one which world offers him. The *sanyasins* indeed die to the world. Even funeral rites are served when they leave their homes for seeking the peace as homeless wanderers.

### III. PEACE-EXPERIENCE IN CHRISTIANITY

The peace-experience in terms of personal liberation, or liberation from the worldly desires and attachments, was not peculiar to the Indian religions alone. It is prevalent among the Christians too. Ascetical attitude among the early Christians seems to have arisen out of the context of martyrdom.<sup>14</sup> As martyrdom was considered to be a culmination of perfection in the following of Christ, the daily dying with Christ was keenly promoted as a preparation for actual martyrdom. But from this core of self-denial there arose certain exaggerations which set a trend of contempt for the material world, a negative attitude towards marriage, abstention from meat, etc. So much so, an increasing number of Christians in Syria, Palestine and especially Egypt were drawn to deserts in order to live a life of seclusion, self-denial, prayer and penance. Through a variety of mortifications such as retrenchment in food, sleep, clothing and lodging, they tried to subdue their passions so that they could rise untrammelled to God.<sup>15</sup>

13. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, (George Allen & Unwin, Bombay, Second Indian reprint 1976), pp. 64-65.

14. Cf. T. R. O' Connor, "Asceticism (Early Christian)", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, pp. 936-39.

15. For a summary exposition on the early development of monastic life in Christianity, see, Christopher O' Mahony, *Church History*, Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, Alwaye, Vol. I, 1974, pp. 197-201.

Some of them were not satisfied even with such withdrawals from the world. They chose to live in such a solitude that they even lived on top of a pillar for years. The most well-known example is St. Simon Stylites who is said to have lived for 30 years on the top of a pillar.<sup>16</sup>

With St. Antony the Great, Communities of solitaries were formed, living in groups of cells. From these arose the so-called monastic life in the Church. Those who preferred to live away from the active life of the world lived apart in cells. But still a whole group of cells were encircled by a wall. And all the inmates of the monastery were to observe a common rule regarding spiritual exercises, food, clothing, work etc. The monastic ideal was thus viewed as a happy combination of both solitary and group life. This idea of peace-experience was popularised by St. Benedict in the West by his ingenious adaptation of it to the cold climate of Western Europe and active temperament of the people. Thus the monastic way of life became very popular, coming within the reach of a greater number of men of good will. They could attain peace-experience by going to the monastery for staying there either temporarily or permanently, by sufficiently retreating oneself from the world and yet involving oneself into the work of uplifting the poor people all around the monastery by their humanitarian service. Thus the monastic type of peace-experience in Christianity gradually acquired a social dimension.

With St. Francis of Assisi, the shift of emphasis became decisive. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to go into the details of peace-experience initiated by St. Francis of Assisi. Yet I may point out the main lines of his peace-programme, which are evident from his famous prayer. He prays to the Lord that he might be made an instrument of peace in the society. But how? By sowing love where there was hatred; pardon, where there was injury; faith, where there was doubt; hope, where there was despair; light, where there was darkness; joy, where there was sadness. His deep longing was that he should console others rather than be consoled by others; that he should understand and love others, rather than be understood and loved by others. For, his firm conviction was that in giving only he could receive, in pardoning alone he could be pardoned, and in dying only he could be born to eternal life.

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16. *Ibid*, p. 201.

The most illustrious example of the society-oriented peace-experience in the modern times is Mother Theresa. She felt uncomfortable with the type of peace she was supposed to find in Loreto Convent.<sup>17</sup> She was so sincere to herself that she took bold to lay aside her habit along with immense comforts and security she was enjoying until then in that enclosure. With the sole weapon of her heart, namely faith in God, she stepped on to the gutters of Calcutta to pick up the dying and the destitute only with a view to revealing the distinct values of Christianity, namely love and charity. In that apparently insecure life she was able to find a great peace because in that life of dedication to the sick and the dying she saw her offering to the Master. Besides, she was also able to instill the peace in the minds of many a young man and woman. As a result, an order of missionaries has sprung up who have decided not to go to the cloister for getting the peace in the traditional way, but rather to find peace and solace in working among the poorest of the poor, and in dedicating themselves to the task of giving love and dignity to those who, having lost hope, were prepared to die on the streets, uncared for.

Of late, quite many Christians have begun to reconsider the peace obtainable through charitable works like feeding the hungry, healing the sick, consoling the afflicted, and educating the illiterate. These endeavours, they feel, relate to the alleviation of human suffering but not the removal of its cause. The real cause of the suffering of the teeming millions lies, according to them, not in the lack of development (in the sense of modernization and technologization) but in the many exploitative structures, social, political and economic. Hence, the real solution consists in radical change of those structures. Accordingly, one should not be content with development services and relief measures. But rather one needs to take relevant and meaningful efforts to change the present exploitative structures and create a relationship and fresh value system. So the real source of peace-experience consists in initiating revolts against the exploiting class rather than alleviating the sufferings of the exploited.

After living with the poor, and having learnt about the oppressive structures that keep them poor, many priests and nuns have realized the

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17. For a reliable write up on Mother Theresa by a secular author, see Sunit Mitra, "Mother Theresa, The Miracle of Love", in *India Today* May 31, 1983, pp. 86-97.

need for more relevant and radical measures even within the Church. Being convinced that the organizational and economic power-structures of the Church are more in support of the exploitative agencies, some priests have preferred to challenge the Church by even relinquishing their connection with the Church. They find their source of peace in working for the poor, and in the involvement with the irrepressible and inextricable politics, that is politics of confrontation with the Church, as well as other social-economic structures. The outstanding example of this type of peace-struggle may be found in Camilo Torres. After being a priest for more than a decade and even after having occupied great positions in the Church institutions, like the Dean of Advanced School of Public Administration, he realized that it would be possible for him to work properly only as a lay man. He even became a radical and secular politician. He became finally a guerrilla only in order to take side with peasants in their struggle against their oppressors. In the process of his liberation-struggle he was martyred!

This sort of peace experience is catching up in Indian Christianity also. A group of priests and nuns have relinquished all their ways of finding peace in and through their daily routine of prayers at set hours within the four walls of their presbyteries or convents. Particularly on the occasion of the fishermen's agitation in Kerala<sup>18</sup> these priests and nuns took themselves to streets on behalf of the suffering fishermen, unmindful of the consequences arising from the traditional understanding of priests' mission. The dedicated involvement of such priests and nuns may be viewed as a serious threat to the power-structures of the Church. They are therefore very often confronted by the authorities sternly. Their movements are restricted. Their protest voices are frequently silenced. They are tossed about whenever possible. Despite these hardships, these people have a peace experience which they could not even imagine in their former routine life.

There is besides a mushroom growth of action groups<sup>19</sup> of educated youth of the country leaving the comforts of urban life, going and living

18. For a balanced write-up on the subject, see, M. K. George, "The Kerala Fisherfolk Struggle" (in *Vidyajyothi*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 9, Oct. 1983. pp. 467-473.
19. For a well-documented information on the emergence of action groups in India, see, Wilfred Felix, "Harbingers of Hope, Action Groups in India", in *Vidyajyothi*, Dec.1985, Vol. XLIX, No. 11, pp. 539-563.

with the poor villagers and working for their liberation through a variety of activities. They create a self-awareness among the afflicted, making them understand their rights, their plight and its causes. They organize them in various ways such as forming Associations, Co-operative Societies etc., and thus mobilize their power. They offer free legal aid to them in order to get justice. They represent their grievances to the public authorities, helping them to voice their longings and hopes: they totally identify themselves with the exploited, and share their food and living conditions.

The activities and experience of these action groups as well as the priests and nuns may seem subversive. However, in their view, it is a search for *real peace* in society. They are convinced that their search is a religious one. It arises out of a re-interpreted faith in Jesus. They see Jesus as the greatest of revolutionaries, who challenged and fought against the oppressive structures of his society, both the religious and social. He took side with the marginalized and the powerless. And he refused to compromise with the power-holders. As a result, he had to die an ignominious death. So also, these people are clear that their lot will also be no better than that of their Master. They know that their struggle for liberation is always costly and risky. It demands a heavy price, and they are ready to pay it. In a world which is outwardly and falsely peaceful these people are ready to go as messengers of strife and struggle so that real peace may be established. In a world which is fundamentally in conflict but apparently in calm, they are real messengers of peace, though outwardly their work may seem subversive. It is in struggle they find peace!

#### IV. THE GANDHIAN WAY OF PEACE-EXPERIENCE

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in his *Autobiography* refers to many a bitter experience in his life, both public and private. He says that he was even thrown into temporary despairs. However, he cherished a great deal of peace in his heart. There were people who even envied his peace. He was rightly called the "Prophet of Peace", and "Apostle of Peace". What interests us here is that his peace-experience was a religious experience, as will be clear from the subse-

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20. *Young India*, 24.9.1931, p. 274. For easy reference see Chandracant Kaji, Ed., *Prayer*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1977, p. 28.

quent discussion. Besides, I believe, an impartial analysis of Gandhi's peace experience has a lot of similarity with all the types of peace-experience we have considered so far. Hence we shall analyse the various aspects of peace-experience in the life of Gandhi.

The Gandhian peace experience was first and foremost rooted in prayer. About his peace he said once: "That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer. Prayer has been the saving of my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago."<sup>21</sup> On another occasion he said: "The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world. The man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable... Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts."<sup>22</sup>

Another main source of Gandhi's peace experience was his habit, of reading Scriptures. Again, to put it in his own words: "When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgita*. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the *Bhagavadgita*".<sup>23</sup> Gandhi esteemed the *Gita* to be his mother, filling the place of his earthly mother whom he lost very early in his life. Whenever he was in distress he sought refuge in her bosom. She, too, never turned him away, he said. "A votary of the *Gita* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding."<sup>24</sup>

Besides being rooted in prayer and Scripture, Gandhi's peace-search was steered towards service of humanity too. "The immediate service of all human beings becomes a necessary part of the endeavour"<sup>25</sup>

21. *Ibid.*, Cf. also C. Kaji, *op. cit.* p. 27.

22. *Young India*, 23.1.1930. For easy reference, Cf. P.K. Prabhu Ed., *Truth is God*, Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1980, p. 40.

23. *Young India*, 1925, pp. 1078-79.

24. *Harijan*, 24.8.1934, p. 221.

25. The endeavour Gandhi refers to in this place is his search for God-realization.

simply because the only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all . . . If I could persuade myself that I should find Him in a Himalyan cave I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find him there apart from humanity."<sup>26</sup> Even when Gandhiji insisted on the importance of prayer it was primarily as a preparation for the service of humanity: This is evident from the following words. ". . . if we sometimes pass our time in merely repeating the name of the deity as we have to, it is simply a course of preparation for self-dedication, that is, service for the sake of and in the name of God."<sup>27</sup>

Service of humanity meant for Gandhi a multi-religious approach. First it meant service to the suffering and the afflicted. When he saw the sad plight of the illiterate Indian indentured labourers in South Africa, he became a brother to them, and shared in all their private and public sorrows and hardships.<sup>28</sup> He taught them cleanliness, formed an organization for them,<sup>29</sup> through which he worked for the improvement of their status. When a leper came to his door he was not satisfied with merely giving him a meal. He also offered him shelter in his own house, dressed his wounds, and looked after him till he found a place for him in an hospital.<sup>30</sup> His spirit of service was so intense that he offered himself to serve as a nurse in an hospital for two hours daily in the morning.<sup>31</sup> When the Boer war broke out, he prepared an Indian Voluntary Ambulance Corps through which he gave the victims immense relief service.<sup>32</sup> On the outbreak of black plague he engaged himself in nursing the victims patiently.<sup>33</sup> At the time of Zulu Rebellion Gandhi raised a stretcher bearing group. On their stretchers they would carry the wounded and attended upon them

26. D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma, Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, (Bombay, 1952), Vol. IV.p. 109.

27. Gandhi wrote this in a letter to Shevakram Karamchand, Cf. *The Collected Works*, Vol. 23, 1967, p. 289. Also, C. Kaji, *op. cit.* p. 76.

28. M.K. Gandhi *An Autobiography*, IVX/IV (The first number indicates the part, and the next the chapter).

29. "Natal Indian Congress"—M. K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, II/IXX.

30. *Ibid.*, III/IV .

31. *Ibid.*,

32. *Ibid.*, III/X.

33. *Ibid.*, IV/XV and XVI.



as nurses.<sup>34</sup> In the Tolstoy Farm, Gandhi shouldered the responsibility for training the young in all realms, literary, vocational and spiritual.<sup>35</sup> Thus Gandhi offered his relief service to humanity in various capacities.

Gandhi was never satisfied with merely relief-services. In the long period of his public life, whenever he happened to face an injustice he fought against the very system which was the cause of it. He even considered that he would not attain his religious goal of knowing God face to face unless he wrestled with the exploitative structures at the cost of his life. The very first case of injustice he witnessed in South Africa<sup>36</sup> made him perceive that the root-cause of it was structural in the sense that it arose out of the exploitative attitude of *the ruling class as a whole*. Hence he resolved to fight for a structural solution, viz. repeal of the Act itself. In the light of the general treatment metted out to the Indian in South Africa it became clear to him that the hardship he was subjected to in the train was "only a *symptom of a deep disease of colour prejudice*".<sup>37</sup> And his firm resolve was to "root out the disease" itself.

As a result of his resolve, Gandhi had to face a lot of hardship. But he bore them patiently. The cause of justice was more important for him than his own comforts. His decision to fight against injustice was so firm that he would not accept any injustice at a personal level. He would reason about it with the authorities. He would plead with them. He would appeal to their better judgement and the latent humanity. He would never be a willing victim of any show of injustice. Gandhi's decision to fight against injustice more specifically, of racial discrimination by the British imperialists did not stop at the personal level. But he was also determined to fight against oppression, at an organizational level. He formed the Natal Congress to look after the interests of the Indians and continued to be the brain behind it all through its functioning. The price he had to pay for his determination was too dear indeed! He had to prolong his stay in South Africa, although he had gone there only for a year. He had to plunge into

34. *Ibid.*, IV/XXIV.

35. *Ibid.*, IV/XXXII-XXXIV.

36. *Ibid.*, II/VII. (The train-incident is referred to here.)

37. B.R. Nanda, *Mahatma Gandhi, A Bibliography*, (George Allen & Unwin Reprint 1971), pp. 26 ff.

active politics. And he did plunge into it snapping his family ties, sacrificing his career, and foregoing his material wellbeing. He stayed there for twenty one years for the only cause of liberating the illiterate Indian minority community in South Africa from the clutches of the racial discriminating Europeans. At long last he did win his cause. He got the structural solution he wanted, viz., the repeal of the laws of discrimination.

On his return to India, Gandhi had to involve himself in the Indian politics and fight for the political freedom of the country. It is very significant to know the reasons for his involvement in the freedom struggle. In the statement he gave in his first trial Gandhi said that he came gradually but decisively to the conclusion that British rule as a 'system' had done irreparable harm to India politically and economically; that the law itself had been used to serve the foreign *exploitations*; and that administration of the law was prostituted consciously or unconsciously for the benefit of the *exploiter*. Hence he developed a disaffection for the British Government, a Government which in its totality had done more harm to India than any previous system. He even affirmed that he considered it to be a *sin* to have affection for the *system*. He esteemed it a privilege to be able to write various articles in his Weeklies against the Government and thus induce people to develop the disaffection for the Government.<sup>38</sup> The foreign power was too big a challenge to him as well as to the country. Yet he took the challenge. He awakened the power of the people to such an extent that he finally obtained the liberation of the people from the political oppression of the unjust rule.

Gandhi's fight against injustice did not remain at the racial and political levels only. It was also directed against economic injustice. The Champeran case<sup>39</sup> is the best illustration. In addition to such individual Satyagrahas, he proposed the overall revolution in the Indian economics by reviving the village-oriented, decentralized, unexploitative economic structures. It was all in opposition to the mechanized, highly concentrated and exploitative economy of the western model. This over-all revolution was itself an expression of his sincere approach to establish justice at all levels and by all possible means.

38. For the whole statement, see E. Stanley Jones, *Gandhi Portrayal of a Friend*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1948), pp. 90-94.

39. See M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, V/XII-XV.

Gandhi's commitment to the cause of liberation was so sincere and comprehensive that he plunged himself into purging the social malaise of Untouchability, although he knew well that it was an area of exploitation, coloured with a deeply emotional and religious tinge. He started a movement which removed the gross evil of Untouchability both on the side of the Caste Hindus and on the part of the so-called untouchables. He rightly perceived that the chief cause of the persistence of Untouchability in the Hindu society was the general belief among the caste Hindus that it had a religious sanction. So Gandhi made a massive conscientization<sup>40</sup> that it was repugnant to the fundamental principles of not only Hinduism but also of humanity, equity and justice. He clearly argued that it was morbid growth, a hideous thing, a curse and a canker, a device of Satan, an abscess to be removed.<sup>41</sup> He declared that Untouchability is a crime against God and man. Thanks to his valiant efforts, the free India made a lot of provisions to liberate the untouchables from the traditional shackles.

Thus Gandhi's commitment to justice was total, covering a variety of liberating work. However, Gandhi's uniqueness did not consist so much in the variety of his liberation-struggles as in the attitude he evinced in those struggles. The only reason for initiating the different struggles for the liberation of the weaker sections of society was his conviction that it was the only way of meeting the Lord face to face, of obtaining *Moksha* and of getting his peace-experience. In the very Introduction of his Autobiography he acknowledges: "I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. What I want to achieve, and what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*". This religious pursuit of Gandhi may be paraphrased as a religious search to find peace. In the process of his search he found that God cannot be found unless one serves the suffering neighbour. To quote his own words: "And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and the mighty,

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40. Cf. A. Pushparajan, "Liberation of Untouchables: A Comparative Study of Gandhian Techniques with Ambedkar's" in *Gandhian Techniques for the Liberation of the Weaker Sections of Society*. (Peace House, Madurai, 1986), pp. 201-216.

41. Cf. A. Pushparajan, "Gandhi's Commitment to Social Justice and Social Change", in D. S. Amalorpavadass, Ed., *The Indian Church in the Struggle For a New Society*, (NBCLC, Bangalore, 1981,) pp. 310-325.

I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed classes".<sup>42</sup> His service to human beings did not consist in merely offering relief-services but also in fighting for the abolition of structural exploitations. That is precisely why Gandhi entered into politics. This can also be confirmed with his own words: "I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind and that I could not do so unless I took part in politics."<sup>43</sup> In a word then, Gandhi's religious pursuit of peace included an active involvement of politics too.

Another point of uniqueness about Gandhi's approach is that while he was trying to establish peace among the suffering masses, the poor and the oppressed, he was always keen on establishing peace with the exploiter and the oppressor too. This did not mean that he was trying to compromise with the oppressor, much less yielding to his stand. It only meant that his fight against injustice was purely and perfectly "*peaceful fight*". This may seem a contradiction in terms. Yet it is precisely in combining the two that his greatness lies. This was made possible by his ingenious application of the religious principles, particularly the principles of the Sermon on the Mount<sup>44</sup> to the social problems. On these principles he could steer his struggle against an evil-system, but not against the evil-doer. He is perhaps the only illustration of the validity of the maxim that he can actually do good to evil man while resisting his evil creation, viz. the exploitative structures and systems caused by him.

The so called Christendom in a sense rejected this principle of the Sermon on the Mount as of impractical application in the field of politics. It is they who are responsible for the development of the modern military warfare. However, this 'non-Christian' leader took the Sermon on the Mount so seriously<sup>45</sup> as to apply it to all the realms

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42. Cf. Nirmal Kumar Bose, *Selections from Gandhi*, (Navajivan, Ahmedabad, 1948), p. 45.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

44. The verses which appealed to Gandhi most penetratingly are Mt. 5,39 & 44.

45. Here it may be relevant to keep in mind Gandhi's own words: "It was the New Testament which really awakened me to the righteousness and value of Passive Resistance." Cf. Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, (Publication Division, Govt. of India 1967), p. 100.

of life, including social, economic and political. He has also demonstrated the possibility of holding this principle as an effective means of establishing peace in all realms of life. While rising against the most powerful imperialistic system of the world he rejected sword and bomb not because it was expedient only, but mainly because resistance to oppression by force would create a greater determination on the part of the oppressor to carry on his oppression. If, on the contrary, the soul-power is employed by the oppressed, it would show one's resistance to the evil and at the same time one's will to show love to the evil-doer. This in turn will create a heart-change in the evil-doer, and enable him to remove the oppressive structures he had created either willingly or unknowingly. The net result will be not only winning of justice but also of the heart of the oppressor. That means, there will be an all round peace!

The best illustration of this way of establishing peace, according to Gandhi, was Civil Disobedience or Non-Cooperation. These non-violent techniques meant that the agitators are supposed to not-cooperate with the exploitative designs of the oppressor and thereby thwart them, and at the same time not harbour any hatred against the oppressor. By this way they show their firm determination to resist the evil and the willingness to love the evil-doer. This approach enabled them to convert the enemy into a friend and thus assimilate to themselves the latter's strength. But more than that, the main reason Gandhi gave for the use of the non-violent techniques is deeply religious. "It is quite proper to resist and attack a system, but to resist and attack its author is tantamount to resisting and attacking oneself. For we are all tarred with the same brush, and are children of one and the same Creator, and as such the divine powers within us are infinite. To slight a single human being (even if he is the oppressor) is to slight those divine powers and thus to harm not only that being but with him the whole world".<sup>46</sup>

Not only the reason which Gandhi gave for the use of non-violent techniques is religious, but also the outcomes of the non-violent methods are deeply spiritual. For, when Gandhi initiated the Non-Cooperation movement, he actually galvanized the latent heroism of the ordinary people into challenging the oppressor's brutality. Had the brutal powers of the masses been aroused against the oppressor's brutality, it

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46. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, IV/IX.

would have only augmented the exploitative activities of the oppressor, because the oppressor who has already the money-power and man-power with him, when aroused, would make use of them to the maximum in order to destroy the people's movement however good and well-intentioned their resistance may be. This is exactly what is happening in Sri Lanka. The net result will be confusion worse confounded, instead of the desired peace. This is precisely what would not happen in the Gandhian approach to peace.

## V. COMMENTS AND CONCLUSION

In the foregoing survey we have analysed four principal models of peace-experience in the Indian context: (1) the popular model; (2) the ascetic model; (3) the service model; (4) the Gandhian model. A rapid glance at them gives the impression that the first three models are quite distinct from one another, yet in fact, the last model shows the complementarity of all the other three models with one another.

One may be inclined to place the popular model of peace-experience at the lowest rung of the ladder. However Gandhi would not be ready to do so. He would find a deeply religious quest even in a popular practice like the tree-worship. He would allow it so far as it helps the devotee to live with the problems of life and thereby to find peace within himself or herself. There is no denying of the fact that the devotee's problems may many a time be the result of the unjust activities of certain oppressive agencies or persons. In those cases the popular models of getting peace would prove an escape from the actual struggle which people will have to initiate against evil structures. Gandhi was not unaware of this danger of the popular religious practices. Hence he was keen on channelizing the religious quest involved in popular practices in a liberative way. Interreligious prayer meetings, Bhajan singing, Scripture readings from different religions are some of the ways through which Gandhi tried to change the popular religious practices into methods of conscientization mobilization for liberation of the country.

The ascetic model of peace-experience may seem to be individualistic and otherworldly. However, it has a social dimension too. An ascetic's life as a whole is indeed a pointer to the ultimate values of human life from which the social values alone are validated. Again, his utter

detachment, untrammelled vision, absolute freedom of mind, universal approach to life—all this proves a powerful challenge to the corruptive power and cynic compromise of the rulers. His very presence becomes a conscience of society. Of course, all these effects on the society are rather indirect and inferential. However it was unique to Gandhi to live an ascetically simple life in identity with the poor of India, and make use of such ascetic practices like fastings as a powerful weapon to fight against injustice and exploitation.

The service model *seems* to be highest of the three. Within this model itself, we saw, there are many levels of which the liberation model is ordinarily considered the best. For, by conscientizing people of the structural injustice and initiating them to revolt against the oppressive structures, it is considered, the root cause of the social malaise is tackled and thus *real* peace is established in the society. However, it must be borne in mind that mere conscientization and mobilization of people does not guarantee peace. It may cause only greater chaos and confusion, unless the whole revolt is organized on the basis of the principles of justice and fairness and love. In this connection, Gandhi's insistence on Truth, Love (Ahimsa) and fair-play and his firm adherence to the non-violent techniques in all the struggles against exploitation is very relevant. They stand as a corrective to the extreme activist version of liberative model.

In the light of above discussion we can formulate the following conclusions.

i) The Gandhian model of peace-experience is highly religious one and is at the same time woven out of all the three models of peace experience we have herein outlined.

ii) The fact that the Gandhian model is a combination of the other models, incidentally brings out the complementarity of the various models of peace-experience in religions. In other words, no one model is to be considered superior to any others just as no one model is to be considered inferior to any other.

iii) That there can be no hierarchy of the peace-models in religions acquires immense significance against the background of the common opinion that the popular models are superstitious and that the liberation-model is the best of all. For, as we have seen if in the Gandhian

approach, the popular model need not be superstitious merely because it is practised popularly. It can also be made use of for conscientizing people and mobilizing them for a liberative action. Likewise, the liberative model need not necessarily be religious, because its insistence on structural injustice and its impatience in attacking it in a structural way may take such an extreme form that it may slip into a merely ideological platform and may lose sight of the righteous and religious dimension.

iv) No religion can claim superiority merely because it has developed the service model of peace-experience just as no religion can be dubbed merely otherworldly merely because it has encouraged the ascetic model. If it was possible for Gandhi to be an ardent Hindu till the end of his life and yet could change the so called 'otherworldly religion' into liberative action, it follows that the updating of a religion depends upon the ability of the followers of a religion to re-interpret its own sources so as to make their religion applicable to a particular context and time.