

## COMMUNICATING WAR AND PEACE: THE CONSEQUENCES OF MEDIA IMPERIALISM AND CULTURAL CONFLICT

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The twentieth century was marked by technological innovations of revolutionary scope and scale leading to digital transformation of the communication landscape, technological convergence, worldwide media coverage and globalization of media content. The post World War II period has witnessed a growing role for the mass media of almost every country in international relations, an intensification of ideological struggle and a tremendous expansion of global information technologies (Frederick, 1993: 217). The world has been emphatically referred to as a 'global village' in the light of the above developments which had the potential of bringing people closer to one another as never before.

The reality is far from this euphoria; even a cursory review of the history of genocides in the last century reveals that 62 million civilians were killed in the erstwhile Soviet Union (1917-1991), 35 million killed in Communist China, 21 million in Nazi Germany (1933-45), 10 million in Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang China (1928-49) and 6 million in militarist Japan (1936-45). The Persian Gulf War (1990-91) reportedly left over 150,000 dead, 100,000 maimed and created 1 million Kurdish, Shiite and Palestinian refugees followed by epidemics, vendettas and high infant mortality rates that resulted from a breakdown of basic utilities in Iraq and Kuwait. The recent Afghan War code-named *Operation Enduring Freedom* has displaced more than one million people who are the world's poorest and nearly six million of them are dependent on the World Food Programme (WFP) for survival. It is indeed tragic that nearly half of these in need are children under the age of five and women (several of them mothers on whom fatherless families depend). It is a soul-searching question which all of us must answer as to *whose freedom* is being secured by such mindless violence through inhuman methods.

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It is estimated that there are currently more than 15 million refugees in the world and over 150 million displaced people. These facts are enough to explode the myth of a 'global village' and that communication is increasingly helping to create a peaceful and harmonious world order. This paper on the eve of the International day of Peace on September 21st, will focus on the Eastern and Western cultural complexes composed of value system, ideology and mythology supporting war, the emergence and influence of the military - industrial - communication complex, media imperialism and cultural conflicts in the communication of war and peace, and implications for promoting a culture of peace and non-violent means of conflict resolution.

### **Communication and Cultural Complex in War and Peace**

The flight of ordinary people from the calculated brutality of escalating war, violence and life threatening situations urges us to contemplate seriously on two of the most timeless and touching themes in the history of humanity as referred to by Tolstoy - *War and Peace*. The media's coverage of domestic and local news can be mediated to an extent by personal experience or interpersonal communication but media's power is almost absolute in the coverage of international events such as war and peace. It was found that television was the main source of information on the Gulf War for 89% of the Americans, one of the highest figures ever reported in public opinion polls (Dennis, Stebenne, Pavlik et al 1991: 90).

The Canadian economist and cultural historian Innis (1951) observed that our media of communication and our ways of using them determine the civilisation of the time. They affect the character of knowledge and the distribution of power in societies. Religion, politics, education and even the rise and fall of empires rest on the prevalent kinds of communication media, their efficiency, their durability and speed (Innis, 1970). Culture is an important factor in the civilisation of different countries to explain how information is used to convey actions of war and peace. The relation between information, war and peace and culture shows that:

The dominant world culture right now is Western culture - a mix of hard and gentle Judeo-Christianity, the roots of which are not too different from Islam - which is centralistic in its image of space; highly dramatic with cathartic and apocalyptic understanding of time,

inconsiderate to nature, non human life, and human life that stand in its way; highly individualistic and competitive and given to monotheistic dedication, hard work, a certain puritanism and greed (Galtung, 1993: xiii).

In contrast, Durrant (1935, Vol 1: 391) traces the continuity and importance of India as an intellectual continent as opposed to the Western mind which only yesterday thought civilisation an exclusively European thing. The end of the Vedic period saw Indian history's entry into a remarkably creative phase through the *Upanishads*, which has had a powerful and pervasive impact on the subsequent history of India. The *Upanishads* are proof of an age of remarkable ferment of thought and inspiration. The *Upanishads* gave a permanent orientation to the incipient Indo-Aryan culture by their emphasis on inner penetration and whole hearted discovery by men to 'know thyself'. This legacy of stress on inward depth had one supreme consequence for Indian culture in that, all its expansive outward movements throughout history were non-aggressive; every word of its message for man has been "spoken with a blessing behind it and peace before" as remarked by Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, Vol II, 1985:106).

The essence of a culture is revealed in the type of human being in whom that culture finds its own highest excellence manifested. A culture is worldly, if worldly success is what its most admired hero represents. This admiration is reflected by the presence of the largest number of Fortune 500 companies in the United States, which is also home to some of the biggest and richest global industrial corporations in the world. The truth in calling Indian culture spiritual derives from the fact that the most admired hero of the Indian people has been and is the 'man of God'. According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan:

The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the valiant knight of medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit, who has attained insight into the universal source by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed himself from the prejudices of his time and place. It is India's pride that she has clung fast to this ideal and produced in every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of the *rsis* of the *Upanishads* and Buddha to Ramakrishna and Gandhi, men who strove successfully to realise this ideal (Radhakrishnan, 1940: 381-82).

The *Upanishads* gave an insight into universality and humanism which are the two essential characteristics of Indian culture. It is concerned with man in his depth, with man above his political or social dimensions of caste, creed, sect or race. An impressive procession of seekers and devotees down the ages, who renounced everything worldly in their search for truth constitutes the unique feature of Indian cultural history, it is a feature which has attracted intellectuals of all types, including the atheists and agnostics and even the ordinary people of the land. The modern age has produced outstanding cultural leaders like Raja Rammohun Roy, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi who were admired not only by Indians but by people all over the world.

The discovery of the spiritual unity of all existence and emphasis on spiritual realisation as the goal of religion helped India to combine deep religious faith with broad tolerance and a spirit of acceptance fostering interreligious harmony. This attitude was cultivated and supported even by the political state. Emperor Ashoka (272-232 B.C.E.) who emerged victorious after the devastating Kalinga War was filled with a deep sense of remorse after seeing the destruction around him. He accepted the Buddha as his teacher and sent missionaries to spread Buddhism in India and several countries abroad such as Burma, Sri Lanka, Tibet and Central Asia from where it spread to China, Korea and Japan. Imperial edicts issued by Ashoka were engraved on stone pillars and rocks throughout the subcontinent to spread the ideas of peace and tolerance. In his thirteenth rock edict, Emperor Ashoka renounces war and proclaims the ideal of *dharmavijaya* or victory through righteousness. This ideal of "toleration as acceptance became the beacon of Indian culture and toleration is the homage, which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite" (Radhakrishnan, 1940: 317).

History teaches us that the rigidity of cultures proceeds largely from the exclusiveness of their religious traditions and political ambitions; much of this exclusiveness is derived from the sense of racial superiority. It is this cultural complex based on racial and socio-political considerations that breed rigidity and intolerance and lead to violence and war. But Indian culture with the spiritual as its motive force is sponsored and nourished by a broad and tolerant *Weltanschauung*. Such a universal outlook and behaviour cannot be rigid or exclusive but assimilates a variety of thought and readily accepts other views worthy of attention. This dynamic process of cultural

assimilation has slowed down under the onslaught of hegemonic ideologies of globalization, liberalisation and transnational control which are rapidly converging to produce a mass culture that transcends the boundaries of space, time and distance.

### The Concept of 'Just War'

The *Upanishads* are regarded as great mines of strength with freedom - physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom - as its watchwords (Swami Vivekananda, C.W. 1985; Vol.II : 223-25, 237-38). What a contrast to the *Operation Enduring Freedom* that unfolded on television across the world directed by a coalition of world powers led by the US! The *Gitopanishad*, commonly known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, or simply the *Gita* was the great philosophy which evolved on the battlefield of Kurukshetra and was spoken by Lord Krishna for the guidance of mankind striving to reach him as life's ultimate goal.

In the beginning, Arjuna decided that he would not fight in the battle of Kurukshetra as he decided that it was impossible for him to enjoy the kingdom after killing his own kinsmen. Arjuna considered it better to forgive his own kinsmen on grounds of religion and saintly behaviour than kill them for political reasons. He envisioned only painful reverses in the battlefield and would not be happy even by gaining victory over his foes. He had no desire to fight but was forced to come onto the battlefield by the obstinacy of Duryodhana, who was never agreeable to any peaceful negotiation.

The Vedic scriptures have conveyed that in this world men are not meant for quarrelling like cats and dogs and must be intelligent to realize the importance of human life and refrain from acting like ordinary animals. Further, animals can kill other animals and there is no question of sin on their part, but if a man kills an animal for the satisfaction of his uncontrolled taste, he must be responsible for breaking the law of nature. The essence of the *Gita* is that a human being should realize the aim of his life. Bearing this in mind, Arjuna questions Lord Krishna as to how a person who knows that the soul is indestructible, eternal, unborn and immutable can kill anyone or cause anyone to kill. (*Gita*, Ch 2: Text 21). To this Krishna replied:

Everything has its proper utility, and a man who is situated in complete knowledge knows how and where to apply a thing for its proper utility.

Similarly violence also has its utility, and how to apply violence rests with the person in knowledge. Although the justice of peace awards capital punishment to a person condemned for murder, the justice of peace cannot be blamed, because he orders violence to another person according to the codes of justice. A surgical operation is not meant to kill the patient but to cure him (*Gita*, Ch 2 : Text 21).

Therefore, the fighting to be executed by Arjuna at the instruction of Krishna is with full knowledge and did not involve any sinful reaction.

The *Gita* (Ch 2, Text 3) says that Arjuna was the most intimate friend of Krishna and Krishna was directly guiding him on the chariot; but in spite of all these credits, if Arjuna abandoned the battlefield he would be committing an infamous act not befitting his personality. Krishna counselled that Arjuna's magnanimity would be construed as false and mere weakness of heart. Krishna asks Arjuna to give up such magnanimity or so-called non-violence especially as Krishna himself was guiding Arjuna. Further, if one did not fight when the situation demands, one goes down in self-estimation and stands to lose in respect, dishonour is worse than death according to the *Gita* (Ch 2, Text 35). Krishna cautions Arjuna that his enemies would describe him in many unkind words and scorn his ability, all of this would be more painful to Arjuna (*Gita*, Ch 2, Text 36). Finally Krishna resolves Arjuna's dilemma to fight the war by saying : "Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat and by so doing you shall never incur sin" (*Gita*, Ch 2 : Text 38). Krishna himself reiterates that: "To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I myself appear, millennium after millennium" (*Gita*, Ch 4 : Text 8).

According to the *Gita* (Ch 2 : Text 27) one who has taken birth is sure to die and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, Krishna advises Arjuna that in the unavoidable discharge of his duty, he should not lament. But Krishna cautions that the cycle of birth and death does not support unnecessary murders, slaughter and war, even though violence and war are inevitable factors in human society for keeping law and order. In the *Gita* non-violence in politics may be diplomacy but it is never a factor or principle (*Gita*, Ch 2: Text 31).

The apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, acknowledged the



greatest influence of the *Bhagavadgita* in his life:

I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgita* that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the *Bhagavadgita* ... 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* (Gandhi, *Young India*, 1925: 1078-1079).

Gandhi regarded the epic *Mahabharata* of which *Gita* forms a part as an allegorical and a historical work. Gandhi believed that the real goal of the *Gita* was self-realization and to show that 'detached activity' - without fear of consequences or desire for reward was the means to the achievement of the goal. Gandhi considered that 'detached activity' was impossible without adhering to the principle of non-violence in the widest sense (Nanda, 1982: 68).

To Gandhiji, the battlefield of Kurukshetra was only a symbol of the battle between good and evil which rages in every human heart, Duryodhana and his party being the baser impulses in man, Arjuna and his party the higher impulses, and Krishna 'the dweller within'. Gandhi pointed out that even if the story of the *Mahabharata* was taken at its face value, the author of the epic had demonstrated the futility of violence in an unmistakable manner; the war had ended in universal devastation in which the victors were no better off than the vanquished (Nanda, 1982 : 69). Despite his unwavering adherence to non-violence; "Gandhiji himself has never so far suggested the doing away with the Indian army" wrote V.K. Krishna Menon to Pandit Nehru in 1939 regarding the defence problems of India (Madhavan Kutty, 1988: 136).

The powerful western countries used the argument of the 'just war' to mask the truth and pursue violent courses of action against those whom they believed were not on their side. A leading proponent of the just-war theory, Michael Walzer admits that 'when the world divides radically into those who bomb and those who are bombed, it becomes morally problematic even if this bombing is justifiable. It is important that the moral reality of war is not fixed by actual activities, but the opinions of mankind'. (Trojanowand Hoskote, 2002). The bombing of Afghanistan is "just" because the powerful opined that it was morally justified. According to a latest CNN/Time poll conducted on August 28 and 29, 2002 about 65 percent of the Americans

agree with the Bush administration that the United States would be morally justified in invading Iraq to remove Mr. Saddam Hussein from power. The support for the war came from only the conservatives while the liberals, senior citizens, college graduates and low income groups were opposed to military action against Iraq (Krishnaswami, 2002).

The Geneva Convention states that combatants "shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives". (Part IV, Chapter I, Article 48). The US and its allies have totally disregarded the above article and its Tomahawk missiles that cost a million and a half dollars a piece were busy flattening out a faraway third world country that could hardly 'scrummage together total assets, military or otherwise, of a million dollars (Ninan, 2001). How could the mass slaughter of civilians in the Afghan war and Gulf war be termed "just" by any definition of justice?

The Afghan war is neither just, nor a war (wars are fought between well-matched combatants). It is a campaign reminiscent of the punitive actions carried out during World War II and the Vietnam War. When you can't catch the perpetrators, you destroy something of their world as retribution (Trojanow and Hoskote, 2002).

The strange justice of the powerful is meant to punish the weak victims (poorest nations) and reward the murderers. Indeed, as the Pentagon dropped tonnes of bombs, it scattered some meals to the winds and the media never questioned this meaningless display of compassion while a nation was being bombed out of existence (Saeed, 2001).

### **Post Independent India as a Cultural Paradox**

India has always been perceived as a country, which stands for non-violence and non-aggression and has at no point of time in recent history attacked other countries. But it is paradoxical that the very foundation of independent India, built on the non-violent freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, culminated in the killing of over 500,000 Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs on the eve of independence. Though these killings were attributed to the Partition, the 55 years of post-independent India has seen an alarming rise in violence with people dying in communal riots all over the country,



caste killings in Bihar, tribal killings in the North-East, political killings in Kerala and Naxalite killings in Andhra Pradesh (Ghosh, 2002). The latest incidents of mindless violence were the Godhra train carnage on February 27th, 2002, carnage in which 57 people, including 25 women and 14 children were burnt alive and the inexplicable scale of violence that followed in Gujarat leaving almost a thousand dead, several missing or injured, and almost a lakh refugees in their own state over a period of two months. Nevertheless, it was some consolation that both the Saurashtra and Kutch regions of Gujarat were by and large peaceful but they merited only a few lines of media coverage as against the rest of Gujarat which burned on the television sets (Prasad, 2002). Despite the prevalence of several communal hotspots in the country, the violence did not spread to the other states. People in the rest of the country kept calm and strongly condemned the Gujarat violence. The majority of the people in India is against communal violence and prefer a peaceful resolution to the Ayodhya dispute and the Kashmir dispute.

In spite of the strongest provocation from terrorist organisations, India continues to keep its diplomatic channels open and set up self-defence rather than attacking Pakistan. Indian culture is a paradox of external toleration and internal rigidity at present. Contemporary international relations have contributed to this cultural paradox. The debate on terrorism and global conflict has become a critique by media of Islamic faith and culture which by implication are counter posed to the core Western values that are assumed to be the basis of all civilized discourse. (Trojanow & Hoskote, 2002). It has indeed become a fashion to demean Islam and uphold Judeo-Christian values as the key to the brave new world order.

The Indian mass media, especially the satellite television channels, are part of several big multinational corporations owned and controlled by advanced countries. These media conglomerates set the agenda and present news, views, values and culture largely from the Western perspective. Communication Transnational Corporations (TNCs) such as General Electric (GE), IBM and AT & T and media behemoth Time Warner have a powerful influence in the political economy of US foreign relations. They sell American media and culture around the world as well as the electronic hardware for the other TNC's operations. As the global juggernaut rolls, national economies collapse to let the free flow of western capital and ideas, a

development that has paralysed the onetime stalwarts of independence. Once assertive and insisting on national sovereignty, governments on all continents have demonstrated their new accommodationist outlook by engaging in sweeping denationalization and privatisation (Schiller 1993, 105). It is becoming evident that nation states are less autonomous and more subject to worldwide trends in matters of security, strategic resources and environmental hazards; national politics is also often being driven by international circumstances (McQuail, 1996: 26).

### **Military - Industrial - Communication Complex**

The intersection between the communication industry and the military in the US became most apparent in 1986 when General Electric (GE), one of the world's major defense contractors bought RCA and with it NBC. The interest of the military-industrial-communication complex played a direct role in television coverage of the Gulf war through sponsorship of news, information and entertainment programmes (Fore, 1991). Dupont, IBM, AT & T and IT & T are all major sponsors of television programme and have major stakes in the public support for the development of high-tech armaments. The US ongoing direct involvement in the 'Coalition against terror' has resulted in more terror with an estimated 500 million small arms and light weapons in the world that has killed two million children in the last decade of the 20th century, according to UNICEF estimates. And these killing machines are produced mainly by states that are permanent members of the Security Council and enjoy the absurd privilege of a veto (Trojanow and Hoskote, 2002).

The US is also responsible for the nuclear bombing of civilians in Hiroshima/Nagasaki, the use of chemical weapons in Vietnam which killed over two million civilians, the use of sanctions since the Gulf war leading to the deaths of 1.2 million Iraqis of whom 500,000 were children. As if this record was not enough, the US Vice-President Dick Cheney recently spelled out the Bush administration's rationale for launching a preemptive strike against Iraq by saying that he believes the dictator will add the nuclear bomb 'fairly soon' to his arsenal of nuclear weapons. It is even more ironical that the global powers, individually or jointly, block all initiatives against weapons and war - most recently for instance, the international agreement on landmines. Does not the production and sale of arms for the purpose of profit amount to complicity in terrorism? As rightly pointed out: "The military -

industrial complex is governed by suave, pleasant family men who keep their eyes focused on spreadsheets rather than manifestos . . . you don't have to be a turbaned fanatic to be a murderer" (Trojanow & Hoskote, 2002).

The Internet, which has enveloped the communication and information industries like an electric cloud encircling the earth, also has its beginning in the military industrial complex. In 1958, the US Defence Department created the Defence Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) to organize military research development efforts in computers. DARPA worked with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to build time-sharing computers and with MIT, Stanford and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) to create packet switching, a system that packages bits in information for efficient and economical distribution over a communication network. These developments led to the creation of Arpanet, a computer communications network which is the forerunner of today's Internet and information highways. The significance of the computer for US military action becomes clear from the US Congress Senate Committee (1984) reports: "It was data processing which has provided the ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) accuracy necessary for preemptive strikes. And it is data processing which will be at the heart of any defence against ballistic missiles" (US Congress, 1984:8 quoted in Mosco, 1993). Thus advanced communication systems have become integral to the growth and maintenance of a war system.

### **Communicating War and Peace**

In 1978, UNESCO's member states adopted a historic declaration titled *The Declaration of Fundamental Principles Concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War* which specifies in Article III the role of the mass media in peace:

The mass media have an important contribution to make to the strengthening of peace and international understanding . . . in countering . . . incitement to war. The mass media by disseminating information on the aims, aspirations, cultures and need of all peoples, contribute to eliminate ignorance and misunderstanding between people (UNESCO, 1979: 13).

The UNESCO became a special target of the US government and the American media because the forum regularly voices the opposition of members to the international information order supporting violence. The US withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 and has not reentered it again. The third world nations opposed Western hegemony perpetrated by the TNCs and world media which pays attention to them only when disaster strikes or there is an armed upheaval.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon confirm that 'war and violence was primarily part of a vast cultural complex composed of value system, ideology and mythology, all of which are conveyed by the mass media, mass culture and education' (Holt, 1987: 53-60). It was for the first time that Hollywood, reeling from the New York terrorist attack, began to change its movies by shelving or changing those featuring terrorists, huge explosions or even the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Millions of moviegoers who watched the destruction in New York on their televisions gasped that it resembled a Bruce Willis 'Die Hard' movie. It was reported that the TV studios were hard at work rethinking their output as programmes with terrorist themes and explosive special effects on screen were cancelled in an attempt to deglorify terrorists and reduce the suffering of the grieving people (*The Hindu*, October 14, 2001).

Historically, peace has been defined as an interval between wars and the international peace movement has primarily emphasized on military questions such as disarmament and interim agreements in the form of peace treaties. Galtung (1968; 487) distinguishes two concepts of peace: "*negative peace*, defined as the absence of organised violence between such major groups as nations but also between racial and ethnic groups because of the magnitude that can be reached by internal wars; and *positive peace*, defined as patterns of co-operation and integration between major human groups". The mass media have a fascination for war and violence and therefore tend to neglect the peace forces at work. Media have a penchant for registering the sudden and negative not the patient, long term work of thousands millions of citizens. Ordinary peace-minded citizens and the peace movement cannot be heard in the mass media as they depend on advertising and not the public for their survival. It is only when international peace awards and prizes are announced that the media take note of them. Even among the peace awards, it is only the Noble Peace Prize awardee who receives a fair share of media coverage not

so much for his/her peace work but for their celebrity status. During the unprecedented scale of violence in Gujarat from 27th February 2002 to end of April 2002, there was hardly any media coverage of prominent peace activists, their views on communal harmony and non-violent means of conflict resolution. Nirmala Deshpande, a Gandhian and ex-Rajya Sabha member whose *Shanti Sena* (Peace army) has played a key role in strife-torn areas in India, pointed out that the media played a very negative role by giving coverage only to violence and destructive elements and has ignored any good work being done. She cited the case of Kishwar Nahid, the famous Pakistani poetess, who organised a huge peace march in Islamabad, which was five kilometres long but merited only a few lines in the media. Being very critical of the media, Deshpande said "but the moment five mullahs with long beards utter some nasty slogans, the world media descends on them".

The US media are no less guilty of distorting and ignoring peace processes. Since the September 11 attack, the *New York Times* has downplayed and distorted peace rallies and demonstrations in the US against a military response. After thousands of anti-war activists gathered in Washington on September 29, 2001 the *New York Times* responded with a ten-sentence story under the headline *Protesters in Washington urge peace with terrorists*. The demonstrators were asking to bring terrorists to justice through non-military means. The headline is a grossly subverted protesters' message (Saeed, 2001).

The *New York Times* also misreported other basic facts like the size of the crowd in Washington. It was estimated that a "few hundred protesters" were present while the official police estimate was 7,000. Reports by C-SPAN coverage showed that the *New York Times* was way off the mark. The *New York Times* has made it a habit to go awry when counting peace protesters as in the case of the Gulf War and the million - man march by black leader Louis Farrakhan, whom the *New York Times* disapproves of (Saeed, 2001).

The main question that preoccupied the Americans and the US media was not why did it happen but how could it happen (Vanaik, 2001). The why questioned was quickly disposed of as an act of mindless terrorists or religious fanatics who hate America and the values of decency, democracy, freedom etc that it stands for. Those who said that the US must not seek revenge by waging war on Afghanistan or engage in activities amounting to

terrorism including the killing of civilians of other countries were rare and such views, if any, were the voices of religiously inspired pacifists or uncompromising liberals. Still rarer were those who pointed out that the US government's actions abroad and problems of foreign policy had helped create the breeding ground from which substate and combat group terrorists have emerged.

The above analysis confirms that neither peace issues nor peace views dominate the reporting of the news media. The media's tendency to highlight the sensational, dramatic, disastrous and dangerous, and the negative, in general, leads many peace activists to become skeptical and regard the mass media as a major obstacle to the creation of a peace culture (Bruck and Roach, 1993: 88).

### **Media Imperialism and Cultural Conflicts**

Despite the growth of multicultural societies in several advanced countries, there is Eurocentrism which contributes to the mythology of war by viewing the 'other' (including Muslims, the coloured people and third world nations) as an enemy.

It felt good to eradicate people who when left to themselves, expressed a preference for peasant agriculture, ancestor worship and cooperative effort . . . A host of images and mythologies have sustained American imperialism; the belief in justified revenge for an imagined wrong, tyrannical centralisation of power, the belief that the United States stands as God's trustee of civilization, an obsession with technology, and the fear of losing (Norman, 1975).

Imperialism is usually applied to characterize the relations of the industrialised North with the countries of the South (or third world) through military, political or economic structures that undermine a country's sovereignty. By the 1970s this domination extended to cultural imperialism through mass media and mass culture. Most of the Asian, African and Latin American nations realized that imperialism was still alive and formal political independence could do little to completely break it. Though there is resistance to such domination, the present era of international relations is one of widespread international agreement. The indebtedness, paralysing weakness and opportunism of the third world has rendered them helpless to



express any joint serious opposition against exploitation, repression or war. For instance, Pakistan, which had the friendliest relations with Afghanistan, broke its ties with the Taliban regime and co-operated with American in its "Operation Enduring Freedom" against Afghanistan. For this cooperation, Pakistan was compensated with aid of millions of dollars and military assistance.

The American media fail to recognise and debate the problems caused by American foreign policy (Vanaik, 2001). The US President George. W. Bush spoke much like the Oracle of Delphi: "If you are not with us you are with the terrorists" and had threatened action even against these harbouring terrorists (*The Hindu*, October 11, 2001). It is a well-known fact that Saddam Hussain, Noriega and Osama bin Laden all began on the right side of the US and that the CIA funded the Taliban. It was only a year ago that the Bush administration gave the Taliban a \$ 43 million subsidy as a reward for suppressing the drug trade (but opium destroyed was the surplus in order to keep prices high in the narcotics trade) (Trojanow and Hoskote, 2002).

The term imperialism rarely appears in the western media but it befits the deployment of more than 500,000 troops in Saudi Arabia. It is also a signal that people's efforts to arrange their affairs without regard for the interests of current controllers (of oil, real estate or good geographical bases) will be met with force. The US led war in the Persian Gulf is a recent instance of such imperialism. In fact, even the UN, which is dedicated to building world peace, offered its mandate for the Persian Gulf War. Further,

...where the US has not produced Frankenstein monsters by itself, it has provoked them into being. Iran is the perfect example. The democratic government of Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran (1951-53) represented a modern, liberal, inclusive Iranian vision; of all 'Islamic' governments its practical values were closest to those theoretically cherished by the West. And yet the CIA overthrew Mossadegh's government and restored the repressive Pahlavi regime to power. Mossadegh's vision embodied precisely those values that Western analysts today claim to find wanting in Islam: he was punished because he dared to challenge the Western control over Iran's resources by nationalising the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (Trojanaw & Hoskote, 2001).

The Western media trial against Islam goes further as academics accuse

Islam of being the only cultural system that regularly seems to produce people like bin Laden or the Taliban who reject modernity lock, stock and barrel. But “how many bin Ladens have the 1.2 billion Muslims produced? 50 or 500? And to blame Islam for the disaster in Afghanistan, a country repeatedly abused by Britain, the Soviet Union and the US is to indulge in despicable cynicism” (Trojanow & Hoskote, 2001).

The broadcasts on the American television channel Fox justified US action by saying: “The US should bomb the Afghan infrastructure to rubble - the airport, the power plants, their water facilities, and the roads. This is a very primitive country. And taking out their ability to exist day-to-day will not be hard. Remember the people of any country are ultimately responsible for the government they have . . . The Afghans are responsible for the Taliban. We should not target civilians but if they don't rise up, against this criminal government they starve, period”. The channel doesn't spare Iraq or Libya either. “Their (Iraq) infrastructure must be destroyed and the population made to endure yet another round of intense pain. May be then the people there will overthrow Saddam. The Bush administration's case against Saddam Hussein, the man American wants to terminate with extreme prejudice, takes an intriguing turn as a bizarre documentary *Uncle Saddam* by the French journalist Joel Soler is being aired on Cinema which paints the Iraqi leader as the genocidal Jerry Seinfeld. He gasses the Kurds without flinching and murders his relatives without twitching as reported by *New York Times*. The newspaper also takes a sharp dig by at Saddam by signing off that ‘the madness of kings was never this mad’ (Dowd, 2002). If Libya's Muammar Gaddafi does not relinquish power and go into exile, ‘we bomb his oil facilities all of them. And we mine the harbour in Tripoli. We also destroy all the airports in Libya. Let them eat sand’. This amounts to a covert terrorist strategy to outdo overt terrorism (Saeed, 2001).

The US has not only supported terrorist regimes but has itself committed acts of terrorism as in the Contra war against Nicaragua in which the US government was found guilty by the International Court of Justice and mandated to pay substantial reparations which the US didn't pay. The American news media fail to connect these events to the present developments and routinely define terrorism in the same way as the US government officials do. The crawling snippets of news quotes at the bottom of television screens showed Bin Laden saying that ‘believers will triumph

and its a holy war against infidels' whereas George. W. Bush declared "May God continue to bless America, and its a crusade". The messages are at times mirror images with the Taliban accusing the US of 'terrorist' attacks and the US bombing Afghanistan to rid the world of terrorists (Saeed, 2001).

The September 11, 2001 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington led to the launch of a global campaign against terrorism which has led to a new divide in the world, on one side are those who are with the US in the campaign and on the other, those who 'are with the terrorists'. There was an avalanche of nations wanting to be on the US side. Regarding India's decision, several foreign affairs experts are of the view that: "The government of India has no alternative to joining the campaign. As one of the worst sufferers of terrorism and consistent with our adherence to the path of tolerance and non-violence we cannot to be seen on the other side of the divide" (Dubey, 2002). India has strangely decided to side with the US (with an even greater record of violence) rather than abstaining from this global combine against terrorism. But this stand is consistent with its foreign policy of nonalignment.

There is no doubt that Musharraf has been more than a willing collaborator in this fight. The US woke to the threat of terrorism only after it was directly affected by the events of September 11. We have suffered terrorism for a much longer period. It is only the threat of war between the two neighbours that has kindled their interest in this form of cross-border terrorism. And they have done their bit. . . . while we welcome their (US) support this is a battle we have to fight. So in that context, the question (disappointment with US as they continue to describe Pakistan as a 'stalwart ally' in the battle against terrorism) of hope or disappointment becomes irrelevant (Sinha, 2002).

The Bush administration is now gearing up to launch a preemptive strike against Iraq. In this context, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said, "We will also demonstrate leadership. It's often the case that when America leads, the world follows". But cautioning them is the Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick J. Leahy who said that the decision to go war "should not be treated like a technicality" (Chen, 2002). Instead of any introspection on past problems caused by foreign policy, the US mainstream media focuses on one theme - retaliation - which precludes any discussion of non-violent means of conflict resolution.

### Technostrategic language and images of war

The cultural conflict and media imperialism became clearer with Washington's approach to the fair reporting of the Afghan War. The *Al Jazeera*, the only free channel in the Arab World was accused by US of being a propaganda tool for Osama bin Laden and the Emir of Qatar was asked to curb *Al Jazeera*. The Emir simply reminded Washington of its Fifth Amendment - free speech as a central tenet of the Western value system. When the US news agencies were toeing the official line on terrorism, Reuters struck to its policy of avoiding the use of emotive words and not using terms like 'terrorist' and 'freedom fighter' unless quoted or attributed to a third party. The global news service said: "We do not characterise the subjects of news stories but instead report their actions, identity and background. So that readers can make their own decisions based on the facts" (Saeed, 2001).

The journalistic doctrines of objectivity and rationality have edged out normative and value considerations from communication and have strengthened the military communication order. Violence and crime are the staple diet of commercial news reporting and their legitimacy is so well established that their social and political functions are rarely noted (Gerbner, 1988: 11). The entertainment industry also glorifies violence through *Rambo* movies, the murder classics (*Silence of the Lambs*, *Psycho*) and video war games. Contemporary mass culture exploits and plays on the vulnerability of and rivalry between insecure people facing an uncertain world. India as the centre of the largest film industries in the world, has come up with the genre of violent love stories in its movies. Such violent themes meant for a largely traditional and peaceful people speak volumes about the inroads made by mass culture in India. The winning icon of the age is the psyched up muscular Mega Man ready for Mega War. These icons have served as the ideals for the Western countries.

In dominator societies males are schooled in violent behaviour from early childhood through toys like violent video games, guns, missile sets, swords and GI Joe dolls: in contrast, girls are systematically socialized for nurturance compassion and caring . . . As it presently stands, mass media messages reinforce male female stereotypes, idealize warfare, present violence as 'fun-entertainment' and sell unsound products along with unsound values. (Eisler, 1993).

The latest in the series of violent entertainment is a digital movie, *Bottomline*, which presents the escapades of internationally notorious conman, Charles Sobhraj who was convicted of one homicide and accused of committing at least 10 more, jewel thief and drug dealer. After his release from Delhi's Tihar Jail, Sobhraj returned to Paris and signed a \$ 15 million deal for his life story (*The New Indian Express*, August 27, 2002).

The medium of language is one of the main conveyers of culture. Cohn (1988) describes the language of defense experts (all men) as abstract and euphemistic. "Defense analysts don't talk about incinerating cities; they talk about 'counter value attacks'. Human death in nuclear parlance is most often referred to as 'collateral damage'". (Cohn, 1988; 85). Such language is far removed from the bloody reality of war and the mass destruction of human lives.

Technostrategic language articulates only the perspective of the users of nuclear weapons, not the victims. Speaking the expert language not only offers distance, a feeling of control and an alternative focus for one's energies; it also offers an escape from thinking of oneself as a victim of nuclear war (Cohn, 1988: 92).

Technostrategic language studded with phrases such as 'collateral damage', 'saturation strikes' and 'carpet bombing' all mean one thing; killing (Roach, 1993: 179). The television coverage of the Gulf war brought technostrategic language and the thought patterns it employs into millions of homes.

In the daily Pentagon briefings, millions of Americans were mesmerized by explanations of smart bombs, laser - guided missiles, by announcements of so many thousand sorties, missions and kills. The video demonstrations of bombs hitting their targets with pinpoint accuracy found a ready audience in young people long conditioned by video games to view war as an antiseptic process - a matter of pushing buttons and making targets disappear in a puff of electronic smoke. (Collins, 1993; 137).

The abstract, acausal language of defense experts on the mass media creates a reality that denies human feeling and human suffering and buttresses the culture of war. This became evident in the Gulf war when media

propaganda about no alternative (when there were four negotiation offers) and 'surgical war' (over 2,50,000 killed) was widely accepted (Galtung, 1993: xii). It was also reported that during the early days of the Gulf war US television commentators compared the bombing of Baghdad to the Fourth of July fireworks. Television never presents atomic blasts in terms of their real life dangers to human life but rather as picturesque mushroom clouds (Nelson, 1987). Television images of war deal with high tech weapons use and their power to perform tasks efficiently (bomb and kill). These images are used to push up the ratings of TV channels. For instance CNN got its ratings boost during the Gulf war and penetrated almost all the Asian and Gulf nations. The images of war have no space for humans that are the targets of smart weapons of destruction. During the gulf war,

We were inundated with images of technology; powerful and exotic aircraft taking to the sky night after night, tanks speeding across the desert, stopping only to shoot at (and always hit) a distant target. In case we missed the point, narrators assured us that the bombs were 'smart' and the strikes 'surgical'. The meaning? That this war was distant and remote and quite separate from our daily lives which may have been why some people tried to hard to 'sell' the war to others (in US) through yellow ribbons, bumper stickers and even paid outdoor advertising (Fore, 1991; 51).

During the Afghan war, the military censorship of the news media prevented the gathering of hard news despite Afghanistan being overrun by the media, turning it into a 'journalistan'. This led the television networks to use footage from the Pentagon files regarding the war machinery being used by US and its allies. The BBC had pictures of the Afghans on the streets of Kabul shopping for food. Such pictures were far from the reality of the horror of nuclear war. Occasionally there were images of families in refugee camps. It is relevant here to question: Is the relative absence of pictures on the ground from the area under attack because *Al Jazeera* was not putting out enough footage of damage, death and destruction or because it was not getting picked up by the channels that the Indian news channels were picking up from? The great irony of this war has been that almost all footage of the actual bombing has emanated from this Arab channel (Ninan, 2001).

Media coverage of enemy images lead to greater escalation in conflict. Television channels repeatedly interspersed film clips of Palestinians in a



celebrative mood with the pictures of the crumbling twin towers of the WTC. This led to greater hardening of the attitudes of the US Government against the Palestinians and numerous prominent American personalities expressed support to Israel on its clamp down on the Palestinian territories. It was later revealed that the film clips of Palestinians celebrating were old file pictures taken on some other occasion and totally unconnected with the September 11 attack. But the damage was done and television channels could do little to restore the right perspective.

The images of violence cruelty are not objectionable in themselves if they are informative and draw citizen's concerns such as the pictures of children starving to death in the desert like plains of Eritrea or of the distorted bodies in the bombed out building of Beirut but their use in a sensationalist way as short, high energy clippings to promote a television station in its ratings war with its local competitors for greater market shares and profits is totally unreasonable. "In sum, the cynical calculation of the number of jolts per minute is part and parcel of commercial, advertising-supported television" (Bruck and Roach, 1993: 90).

The communication and information technologies (ICT) which are integral to the war system can also be used to promote humanist values and peace. *Peacenet*, a non-profit computer based network that connects 300 organizations in 70 countries is the largest peace movement communication service. *Peacenet* allows peace activists to communicate globally via a phone call and was used widely during the Gulf war by activists and researchers to exchange information not available in the mass media, to organize protests, and to send messages of solidarity. In India, several peace activists sent e-mails to the National Human Rights Commission to highlight the plight of people affected by the violence in Gujarat from February to April 2002. The mass media, in its transformation to a peace system, must look away from the reigning western culture and draw on the cultures that promote tolerance and respect for multiculturalism to open up a dialogue on world peace.

### **Media Culture for Peace and Non-violent Communication**

Communication is influenced by the existing nature of civilization and in turn the future civilization shapes up according to the strength of communication content. History traditionally specifies four main cradles of

civilization from which cultural influences have spread to several parts of the world. Moving from east to west, they are China, the Indian subcontinent the 'Fertile crescent' and the Mediterranean, especially Greece and Italy. Recent discoveries in archaeology, astronomy, ancient mathematics and satellite photography, in addition to fresh interpretation of ancient records, show that the Vedic civilization has roots in India that go back to 7000 BC and beyond (Rajaram, 1996: 531 - 538). With due consideration of India as the cradle of civilisation:

Of these four areas India deserves a larger share of credit than she is usually given, because on a minimal assessment, she has deeply affected the religious life of most of Asia and has provided very important elements in the culture of the whole of South - East Asia, as well as extending her influence, directly and indirectly, to other parts of the world (Basham, 1979: 1).

This is no mean achievement at a time when speedy communication technology and transport were almost non-existent. India had eminent thinkers and philosophers many of whom became world preceptors and strove for the establishment of a new world order based on the principles of equality, justice love, peace and harmony. Two such recent outstanding leaders were Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

"I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East" proclaimed Swami Vivekananda more than a century ago. He was undoubtedly the first prophet to define thoroughly and teach explicitly the unity of all religions. His concept of universal religion was to show the spirituality of the Hindus, the mercifulness of the Buddhists, the activity of the Christians and the brotherhood of the Mohammedans in practical life (Swami Vivekananda, 1985, Vol.8: 79-80). Gandhiji who stressed that "my life is my message" evolved a highly integrated pattern of communication consisting of non-violent speech and action, the maintenance of relationships and enrichment of personhood, openness and flexibility (Bode, 1994: 5-26). Both Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji based their message on universality and solidarity expressed in the ancient scriptures of India especially the *Upanishads*. Swami Vivekananda pointed out several years ago that the world was in need of the great Upanishadic idea of solidarity of the universe.

Today through intercommunication, people of every country are

coming to recognise that the people of other countries are also like themselves. In politics and sociology it is increasingly found that problems facing each nation are international and cannot be solved at a purely nation level. Science has established that all matter is one mass in which you and I, the sun and the moon and everything else are but the names of different little whirlpools and nothing more. Mentally also we are only little whirlpools in the universal ocean of thought (Swami Vivekananda, Vol III, 1985: p. 228).

The people of all countries must express their solidarity to counter the 'enemy other' propaganda and images in the mainstream media and foster intercultural dialogue to diminish the possibilities of violence through political sanction or public opinion. IN 1960 speaking before the Political Committee of the UN General Assembly, Krishna Menon said: "Pending a disarmament convention, pending an agreement on disarmament there should be a complete prohibition of the manufacture and the use of weapons of mass destruction. We have never had any reservations on this matter, there is only one thing to do with nuclear, thermo-nuclear and similar weapons. We cannot mend the situation, only end it" (Madhavan Kutty, 1988: 110). The international mass media, the UN, US and several Western countries ignore the democratic anti-war movements and peace-promoting cultures; such news receive no coverage at all in the Western media and the concept of 'breaking news' used by all television channels to report current developments is increasingly assuming negative connotations with only bad news (violence, conflict, sex and other negative values) getting top priority.

The emphasis of the *Gita* is on *lokasamgraha*, world solidarity which requires our active participation to rid the world of wars (Radhakrishnan, 1977: 69). The *Gita* upholds good population in human society as the basis for peace, prosperity and spiritual progress in life. Wars tend to tear people away from their natural home surroundings and leads women to be widowed, children to become orphans apart from leading to rape, disability, unwanted children, poverty, refugees, homelessness, marginalisation and further discontent. It uproots people from social traditions which are the distillation of the mature will and experience of the people. The Islamic countries which are at the receiving end of the Western powers for being 'fundamentalist' have produced exalted spiritual traditions such as Sufism. Through a minority community in India, Muslims have enjoyed equal rights and have occupied

the highest offices of the land. Very few countries can lay claim to such honour. The Christian countries are guilty of using aggression and violence instead of upholding the spiritual ideal of Jesus who said that 'whoever gives up this life for His sake, finds the life immortal'. Immortality cannot be achieved by killing millions of helpless people, violence breeds further violence. The Women of Kosovo offered an advice to the US that 'terrorists are not nations and nations must not act like terrorists'. The international media must make this the keynote of their debate on terrorism and effect a social transformation. The superpowers instead of merely condemning existing society or assuming roles of dictators must remember that differences in religious faith does not affect the eternal occupation of living beings to serve others. As Swami Vivekananda said:

You cannot help anyone, you can only serve; serve the children of the Lord; Serve the Lord himself if you have that privilege . . . do not think too much of yourselves . . . Do it only as worship . . . Bring light to the poor and bring light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the educated are tremendous (Swami Vivekananda, Vol. III, 1985: 228).

The international media must shed its élitist and short-sighted approaches and stir the conscience of the rich and powerful to be more active in uplifting the poverty stricken masses rather than eliminating them as school boys who would swot flies.

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