

HC's Speech at the International Day of Non-violence organised by PPPC on 4th October 2016 at Georgetown

I have been asked to speak on the "International Day of Non-violence" by Peoples' Progressive Party Civic. The first question that raised in my mind is -WHY ME? Why not anyone else? You all know that October 2 is designated as International Day of Nonviolence which we in India celebrate as " Gandhi Jayanthi ", that is Mahatma Gandhi's Birth Day. The Indian High Commission organises a function every year and this year we celebrated it at a simple function on last Sunday at Promenade Gardens in Georgetown which is ornated with a statue of Gandhi which was installed with assistance of the Indian Government even before the independence of Guyana. I think this is the reason why the Diplomatic Representative of India has been chosen for this occasion by the Peoples' Progressive Party Civic.

As a mark of respect to and in commemoration of the Birth Anniversary of one of the greatest and noblest sons of the World, October 2 - the birth Day of Mahatma Gandhi- was declared as the [International Day of Non-Violence](#) by the United Nations General Assembly at its 61st session on 15th June 2007. The Resolution was co-sponsored by as many as 140 countries. This was a clear manifestation of the importance attached to the ideal of non-violence for which Gandhi stood for in his entire life.

How do we define non-violence?

Non-violence means the use of peaceful means, not force. The sanskrit word for non-violence is *ahimsa*. The origin of *ahimsa* or non-violence goes back to as early as 3000 B.C., to Buddha and the Buddhism. The first ever known practitioner of *ahimsa* was, however, the Emperor King of Ashoka who ruled the entire Indian sub-continent in 300 BC.

What Gandhi did was that he developed the ancient philosophy of *ahimsa*, after Buddha, Ashoka and Jesus, into a social and political tool. Gandhi encouraged massive civil disobedience movement against the British colonisers with the historic Salt March in 1930.

For Gandhi "just means lead to just ends"; and it was irrational for him to try to use violence to achieve a peaceful society.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi had realised his vocation in life. When Gandhi started his commitment for fighting for rights of Indians in South Africa, the English Media referred to his struggle as a method of "passive resistance" meaning a form of passivity. On the contrary, in his struggle, Gandhi pursued "actions" which are non-violent. It was there in South Africa that he coined a new word for his non-violent actions called "*satyagraha*". This word called *satyagraha* is made up of two sanskrit words, *satya* and *graha*. *Satya* means 'truth' and *agraha* means 'holding on to something'. So *satyagraha* literally means holding on to the truth even at the cost of one's own life. That's why the great South African leader Nelson Mandela said to the former President of India Dr Adul Kalam when the latter visited there and I quote: "India gave us Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; we gave you back the apostle of non-violence- Mahatma Gandhi after two decades." Unquote.

The force of violence for Gandhi is mechanical, physical, while the force of non-violence is mental and spiritual.

Gandhi therefore referred to *satyagraha* as the soul-force. While doing *satyagraha* one distinguishes between 'the wrong-doer' and 'the wrong-being-done'. That is you hate the wrong-being done but you don't hate the wrong doer.

Generally, there are nine distinct forms of violence :

1. Physical violence;
2. Sexual violence;
3. Emotional violence;
4. Psychological violence;
5. Spiritual violence;
6. Cultural violence;
7. Verbal Abuse;
8. Financial Abuse; and,
9. Neglect

For instance, neglect, which is also a form of violence, occurs when someone has the responsibility to provide care or assistance for an individual or a community but does not.

Violence can again be categorised on the basis of the sufferers; for instance violence on women, children, earth or environment.

Causes of violence:

Let us look at the causes of violence .

Although there are many and complex causes of violence, we may look at two important components which are basic to a violent act. These can be, one- the **propensity to be violent and the other- the trigger** to a violent act. While the propensity to be violent is a personal factor - that is to say, it resides within the individual committing the act, the trigger is a social factor, which resides outside the individual committing the act.

There can be numerous factors that could be potential triggers, for example, excessive alcohol consumption, presence of gangs, unemployment, weapons, broken homes, poor family backup, bad neighbourhoods, a person's or community's faith being disrespected, intolerance, ignorance, violence in the media, etc. The experts however say that with few exceptions, triggers lead to violence only when the **propensity to be violent** also exists.

In my speech today, focus will be Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence against collective authority which used cunningness, exploitation, oppression and violence for perpetuating their unjust rights. Gandhi, however, in his day to day life too, followed and practised the principle of tolerance in order to avoid violence even if he was provoked personally. Once a reporter asked: Mr Gandhi, "Is it true that one's food habits affect one's character. For example Gandhiji, you drink only goat's milk. Does it affect your character? Gandhi retorted, "My dear young man, just now I had a glass of goat's milk. Now I feel an itching sensation at my temples. May be horns are about to emerge. So pack off and run for your safety." He used such humour to bring the situation to normalcy rather than getting provoked.

Gandhi's principle of non-violence ultimately led India to attain independence from the mighty British who ruled India for more than 150 years. Some may argue that Gandhi's ideal of non-violence is too idealistic to become practical. Certainly it is not easy to follow the path of non-violence. However, the issue becomes

clearer if one looks at the other option. Has violence and use of weapons succeeded in bringing an end to the problems? Has bloodshed been a more effective way to resolve disputes? The answers to these questions enlighten us how relevant Gandhiji's messages are today.

It is not a surprise that many world leaders took the path of non-violence shown by Gandhi. Many African leaders fighting against colonial rulers were inspired by Gandhi. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, also known as Gandhi of Ghana, used Gandhi's techniques of nonviolent satyagraha. Dr Nelson Mandela of South Africa was another example of one who was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi in his struggle against apartheid. In the US, even though slavery was abolished in 1861, Jim Crow laws and segregation had reduced blacks to second class citizens. By 1930s, Gandhian techniques had begun to attract black ministers involved in the struggle for racial equality and justice. It was the dynamic personality of Martin Luther King that gave it practical shape in the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s. In the modern times, the Dalai Lama, who seeks a peaceful resolution in Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi, who fought for democracy in Myanmar are living examples. Three of

these — Mandela, the Dalai Lama and Suu Kyi — have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. All proudly acknowledge their intellectual debt to Gandhi.

None can deny the opposite of peace or non-violence is war. Today's world is threatened by the effects of mass destruction by the arms race. In this regard Gandhi's opinion is more relevant. Mahatma Gandhi enumerated seven social sins. They are

Politics without Principles.

Wealth without Work.

Pleasure without Conscience.

Knowledge without Character.

Commerce without Morality.

Science without Humanity.

Worship without Sacrifice.

I would like to highlight one of them , that is – Science without Humanity and its devastating effect on mankind. We may recall what happened on the fateful days of August 1945 when two atomic bombs called “Little Boy”

and “ Fat Man” were thrown on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Hundreds of thousands of people perished within a minute and the cities were completely destroyed. In effect , Japanese surrendered and the second World war came to an end. But debate is on even today whether it was a right decision to use such violent method to prevent the aggression of Japanese who seemed to be unstoppable. That’s why , two days before the Trinity test, Oppenheimer, the father of atomic Bomb, remembered the line from the Holy Hindu scripture, Bhagavad-Gita saying “Now, I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.” Remembering Gandhi’s quote on “ Science without Humanity is a sin”, the famous Scientist Albert Einstein commented about Gandhi and I quote: "Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a man as this one ever in flesh and blood walked upon this Earth” Unquote.

Disarmament does offer a solution to the problem of war, but it cannot offer an adequate solution in the absence of a proper study of the factors leading to a war. Some of these factors are expansionism, the tendency of some countries to impose their political system and life

style on others and the mentality of universal proselytization. We must address ourselves to finding the ways of removing these factors if we want to prevent wars and establish world peace.

One important question arises in my mind. That is : Is non- violence an eternal religion? My answer is YES. But we do not accept it as such. It is only when humanity is threatened with destruction then we start thinking of non-violence. That is the reason why the concept of non-violence is not gaining traction independently and also due to our habit of treating it merely as a method of crisis management. Though violence is a negative tendency and non-violence a positive one, for all practical purposes, we have changed their places. Violence has become primary and non-violence secondary. It has led people to believe that violence is an unavoidable part of life but not non-violence. The rigmarole of violence automatically comes to an end once non-violence is understood to be an inevitable part of life.

But what is happening today is contrary to what one expects .

Man has accorded full recognition to the need for and usefulness of violence. Thousands of scientists are busy inventing destructive weapons and many thousands of soldiers are either undergoing training in the use of arms or staging war rehearsals. All the three important activities namely research, training and practice are going on in the field of violence. It shows the place and the recognition violence enjoys in our lives.

On the other hand, non-violence is gaining recognition in a state of helplessness and compulsion. Consequently no research, training or practice takes place in the field of non-violence. And if any miniscule effort in that direction is being made somewhere, it is no better than a cry in wilderness. This is exactly the big problem today. Violence, though destructive, finds favour with people; non-violence, though one of life's basic truths, does not attract most people. For solving this menace, it is necessary for those who have faith in non-violence to find new ways of thinking.

Therefore, if we want to develop the philosophy of non-violence, it is not enough to be conscious merely of the present events. We should be equally conscious of the prime instincts causing the events. Hence, it is not only important to work for disarmament and banning wars but also important to ascertain the factors that cause of violence. Generally people working in the field of non-violence are much less concerned about the latter and this seems to be the biggest impediment in propagation of the philosophy of non-violence.

We keep hearing about and are also participating in many international conferences propagating non-violence and peace. But if only conferences could establish world peace, we could not ask for a greater blessing. Let us not forget that even governments which organize conferences on non-violence and peace building, simultaneously manufacture and proliferate arms and also encourage others to arm themselves to the teeth in their effort to shamelessly enrich themselves. This duplicity is misleading. What a contradiction!

We all know that armament, disarmament, war and banning of war--all these matters- fall within the jurisdiction of various governments. The common man has nothing to do with them. And those wielding power are not likely to listen to the talk about non-violence. Hence involvement of the common man in achieving non-violence is of paramount important because these people undoubtedly have the power to decide the destiny of those who decide the above matters.

What do we do then to promote non-violence? We need to carefully listen to what Gandhi preached and practised.

Gandhi in his efforts to promote the principle of non-violence emphasized many ways. Of these, the most important one is EDUCATION. According to Gandhi, the aim of education should be to build character. But education of today, both in the East and the West, is to produce money-making machines, not thinking about human beings. It lays a great deal of stress on intellectual development and producing excellent teachers, scientists, lawyers, administrators,

educationists and businessmen. The outcome is that the system is unable to produce high quality ethical, religious and spiritual men. For instance , how many of us read the scriptures of all religions. Most of today's problems are based on thoughts of religious superiority. Gandhi in this regard has said, and I quote “ We must not ,like the frog in the well, think that our religion alone represents the whole truth and all others are false” unquote. So if a Hindu or a Christian deprives himself of the best in the Quran and a Muslim is unaware of the jewels that lie in the Christian and Hindu scriptures, both have denied themselves the right to an enlightened life. To enable this Gandhi asked all the young men and women to make it their duty to read the scriptures of all the religions aiming at a harmonious and peaceful society. Thats why Gandhi said:

Raghupathi Raghav Raja Ram

Ishvara Allah Tero Naam

Sab Ko Sanmatti De Bhagawan

Meaning: Victory to you, God

You are known also by Ishvar , Allah and other names

Please endow us with righteous thoughts!

Gandhi believed that only a balanced personality can bring about non-violence. He was deeply concerned about education of children particularly in their early years for such preparation. For him, the basis of education should ensure the cultivation of the hearts of the young. "Stuffing children's minds" with all kinds of information is not all that important. He decried strongly 'What would it matter if they learnt everything but did not know how to live in brotherliness with their fellow beings?'"

Gandhi's preached tolerance. That is tolerance for others' views and actions as one of the major ways to promote non-violence. Gandhi himself was was a compromiser par excellence. He would always consider other party's point of view and come up with solutions acceptable to all parties. Both in his legal and political work he brought in parties together for resolution of their problems. The ability to compromise comes only when we are tolerant to the other's point of view and do not impose unilaterally the majority's point of view. Tolerance does not tantamount to "cowardice".

Bagawad-Gita, the holy script of Hindus says , and I quote “ If you want to see brave, look at those who can forgive”.unquote.

For Gandhi, among the many forms of violence, poverty is the worst form of violence. Yes – “Hungry man is an Angry man.” Anger will definitely lead to violence.

The world today consumes 2 million dollars every minute on wasteful military expenditure. At the same time every day some 35.000 children die due to lack of food, malnutrition and lack of social care. Gandhi therefore believed in all - inclusive growth and preached that a Nation can become great only when its impoverished masses become better off. He therefore focused on rural development for the last 30 years of his life and felt intuitively that future of any country is in decentralized rural development. This vision which he stated in 1920's is even more valid today after almost 100 years.

Gandhi believed in simplicity. He commented and I quote “The earth provides enough to satisfy every

man's needs, but not every man's greed." Since he practised what he preached, his message had great effect and achieved the desired results. Once a Journalist asked Gandhiji, "Why do you always choose to travel by third class in a train." He replied "Simply, because there is no fourth class as yet." In another instance, when Gandhi was going to attend the Round Table Conference in England, a newsman asked, "Mr. Gandhi, do you think you are properly dressed to meet the King." Gandhi said, "Do not worry, my dear friend, about my clothes. The King has enough clothes on for both of us."

Finally , I would like to conclude that the concept of non-violence will not gain ground unless people learn to respect and care for each other, develop tolerance, understand as well as follow the principle of give and take, control their greed and make a compromise for others' well-being as a collective group. It reminds me in this regard the famous Sanskrit slogan "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" which means "The World is one Family". This is the loftiest and noblest thought that has ever been gifted to the Humanity by the vedantists. They prescribed this universal and eternal concept many thousands of years ago. It is much more relevant than

ever in the globe of today utterly divided and torn between races, ethnicities, religious factions, linguistic groups, etc. Hence it is essential for us to take oath that we belong to one family of humankind and practice the great virtue of give and take between us, to keep the world remain non-violent and peaceful.

Thank you.