Aspirations of Peace and Nonviolence: Learning from Gandhi and Lanza

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Introduction

The vision of peace and nonviolence that exhibited a special identity to the Community of Ark was the real life reflection of the aspirations of Mahatma Gandhi regarding the Community living. Living with minimum requirements, participation in the collective community works, joining community worship, leading daily life with utter happiness, sacrificing superficial wants, fulfillment of basic needs, helping others in the realization of human values are the values shared by the aspirants of the Community of Ark.

When we talk about the philosophy of peace, it points out toward the doctrines of certain fundamental human aspirations in which the human mind attains a constructive status. Peace never stands simply for diffusing anger, tension or any other unrest. It is not the exhibit of any termination of tension or war. It cannot be considered as a dogma opposite to violence, unrest, struggle or fighting. In its absolute sense, peace is a part of the yoga based life duly proposed by Vedic saints as a state of mind. It even ascribes the entire human effort to reestablish that state of peace in the immediate surrounding, and finally in the entire world. It can be stated that Veda describes the attainment of utter calmness and establishment of harmony in the world as an exhibit of peace. Peace is the only state of dwellings in which one can cultivate the possibilities of practicing all sorts of cooperation, brotherhood leading the entire creation finally toward harmony.

Ahimsa is often referred as nonviolence in English. But the term, nonviolence is not reflecting the absolute nature of the term ahimsa as the absolute form duly projected through theories of yoga in Vedic Philosophy. Special emphasis of elaborating the term ahimsa is implied in the works of Patanjali, Buddha, Mahaveera and in a more practical way through the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Still then, we accept the term and replace ahimsa by the negative aspect of violence that often stretch out the meaning of the term nonviolence for accommodating some of the absolute aspects of the philosophy of ahimsa. The term ahimsa took its first appearance in the Vedantic philosophical theories and doctrines. Patanjali considered ahimsa as one of the prominent part of the eight part yoga philosophy (Astanga Yoga Darshan). Ahimsa was accommodated under the yama part of the Yoga theory. Without truth and nonviolence, one cannot make oneself fit for moving across the yoga practices duly reflected by Patanjali.

Ahimsa alone can make a situation suitable for all the organisms staying within certain confinement and facilitating in casting off all sorts of minute differences such as caste, colour, creed, customs etc. Patanjali described the philosophy of ahimsa by coining a simple theory of the concept that reflects the entire beauty of the inherent dogma. According to his theory, “Where nonviolence is established in its absolute sense, organisms living within that surrounding will cast off their individual differences and start leading a life like that of a single family.” People living under such confinement of philosophical convergence even forget their all sorts of individual differences of caste, creed and colour.

Philosophy of nonviolence even secured its prominent position in Buddhism, Jainism and other schools of religion duly developed and practiced in the Indian context. Mahaveera delivered
his doctrines of practicing nonviolence at its absolute level to be followed by Jain Saints. Buddha perpetuated his teachings by placing peace and nonviolence in the central position and instructed fellow followers not to move towards the impulse of violence for putting oneself and the community in trouble. Not to think about creating harm to any individual or to any system even in dream was the absolute doctrine delivered by saints like Buddha and Mahaveera. Most remarkable feature of such ahimsa is the convergence of culture, tradition and rituals towards attaining a communal harmony through sacrificing individually apprehended wants for the facilitation of community welfare. Balancing the need and want is another practical aspect of ahimsa or nonviolence that leads an individual toward attaining satisfaction.

Attainment of such satisfaction, in turn, will make the individual stable by mind, intellect, deed and creed. A follower of peace and nonviolence with such attainment of satisfaction and stability can ascend toward a state of self-regulated individual having adequate faith upon the self. Here becomes the union of both external as well as internal power of the individual.

Collective Worship

Worshipping God for individual satisfaction will be a matter of absurdity because of the involvement of a living being with the immediate surrounding with other fellow aspirants. Remaining away from the habitat and moving apart from the community are rarely possible for any socially awakened being in the actual sense. It is a collective worship duly ascribed for the collective progress that brings more fruitful result for all the individuals engaged in the process of worshipping God. Gandhi emphasised on the importance of regular community prayer for imbuing the benefits of collective worship amongst ashram inmates. It can even remove individual differences, diffuse caste feelings, neglect religious imbalances and promotes harmony through acknowledging the regional variations of worshipping the common Almighty.

Collective worship avails adequate facility to all individuals for exploring possible accommodation of people of all kinds of social as well as economic backgrounds. The Community of Ark duly established by Lanza Del Vasto (1901-1981) in France worked out different aspects of collective worship gradually aiming toward establishing peace and harmony within the community. Each person at the Ark works according to their capabilities and receive as per their needs. In that way none of the community members kept away from the stream of social as well as economic activities duly planned by the community. It will even enhance the self-esteem of the contributor and performer that often paves a path of continuous ascent towards individual refinement in acts and conducts. Such mechanism of collective progress is the real beauty of the life based on peace and nonviolence. The Ark can also be described as a community movement aimed toward accomplishing the common good.

Wants and Needs

What we demand is obviously a state allowing ourselves to expose the greed up to the extreme and make our wants a voluminous one. But, our needs are the specifications of our life process that we surpass on a daily basis. We can limit our wants by regulating our greed and by establishing a subtle control upon our demands. Here our will power can help us a lot. Ultimately will power is the master regulator of our deeds and greed.

We can even minimize our need by making our life process a simple one. Regarding this aspect Dr. J. C. Kumarappa pointed out about the prevailing confusion that often strikes the minds of people regarding standard of living and standard of life. Standardisation of any life process depends upon the type of the habitat and not on the type of self-ascribed choice. We take food as per the basic requirements of our body and not to fulfill the ever increasing greed of bodily pleasure. Kumarappa looks upon the lifestyle of Mahatma Gandhi as an example of simple living and that of any city dweller as an example of a complicated lifestyle. Achieving the goal of simplicity in life should be an ideal pursued by any individual looking for an alternative lifestyle.

Community of Ark emphasized on the necessity of manual labour, fulfillment of basic needs, simple living, embracing voluntary simplicity in daily life, adequate participation of people by consensus decision making and collective worship through community prayers. It is not the
only an aspect of the collective life, but also a part of their aspirations in bringing out certain common resolutions which paves the way for the welfare of the community.

A True Cultivator

The ultimate goal of a human being can be aptly defined as the right kind of knowledge that is housed in the conscious mind. It may lead the person towards defining his/her role in society and also it may lead towards withdrawing from the society after a definite interval of time. What to do and how is obviously an individual affair. The gift of community living is the feeling of the omnipresence of the divine almighty with all its guidance and surveillances. Goal of a life should not be a fixed one. Shantidas moved on from far off places in search of the ideal social and economic order that bring the entire stream of the social and economic practices of a community towards attainment of a permanence impregnated with peace, nonviolence and harmony. After the meeting with Gandhi, moving up to the heights of Himalayas, he has assimilated the message of the divine Almighty and started a feeling of the spark of progress and ascent within himself. It ensured the birth of the Community of Ark in particular and an ideal way of leading a community for collective progress in general. It also convinced him that sustainability lies only in the progress of the people through collective efforts. Not only that, Shantidas conducted a number of nonviolent struggles for conveying the message of peace and nonviolence he received from Gandhi at different issues.14

Lanza Del Vasto, the founder of the Community of Ark in France, is a true cultivator of materializing the dream of establishing the peaceful community living principles in a real context. It has accommodated gandhian principles of community living through accommodating implementation of work based daily living, linking people with manual works, offering equal opportunity of progress to all, creating a scope of development for all community members, removing hatred and inequality from the community, fulfilling basic needs of community members and involving people in community worship on a daily basis. These are some of the important activities of the aspirants of the Community of Ark. It helped the aspirants to lead a peaceful peaceful life and undertaking initiatives that enables one to experience the omnipresence of divine. Lanza del Vasto rightly imbibed the philosophy of peace and nonviolence and prepared the practical aspects of community living and later on practiced the same by himself and other fellow associates of the Community of Ark.15

Lanza even considered agriculture as the base of his economy of peace having subtle liberty upon the access to resources and basic amenities. This was exhibited in the community living based on twin principles of truth and nonviolence. Satyagraha16 was a way of life for Lanza del Vasto like Gandhi. To a greater extent, he tried to put in practice the entire framework of an economy of peace based on a Satyagraha way of life. The community living aimed at accommodating welfare of all the members in which none should feel oneself deprived or disadvantaged. One can fit oneself in the entire stream of social as well as economic activities as per the capabilities and skills duly possessed by the individual. The highest order of the community living is a state in which none are left behind to develop feelings of aloofness in any aspect of work and work is seen as medium of strongest inter personal bonding17 at the community level.

A Stride towards Internal Peace

Peace and prosperity that are exhibited in real life practices is of certain vitality and can sustain for a limited time in the life process. But the peaceful state of mind duly followed by attainment of true knowledge can sustain for a longer time. It is capable enough in cultivating some noble standards of community living which in turn results in making everlasting impact of peace and prosperity in the fellow community. It can even guide the entire group towards adopting community worship for aspiring the collective progress.

Affinity of people towards attainment of collective progress exhibits a higher state of consciousness that can easily accommodate the aspirations of all the individuals leading the community life. During the practice of community worship, a state of mind comes that help us in
withdrawing our senses from the external stimulations and help us in passing across the feelings of the internal spiritual power. At this juncture, we feel the presence of divine within ourselves. That almighty guides us, ultimately, to trace out the goal of our life from the ever sustaining turmoil that prevailing in the natural world.

The people who join the Community of Ark consider their goal of life as establishing peace and nonviolence or leading a life on the basis of Gandhian principles which would ultimately change the entire world for leading a peaceful community living impregnated with prosperity, courage, will power and skill acquisition. An ideal social as well as economic order of living aimed finally towards bringing all people at the base of a core competence that enables them to accept community level productive works and they become capable enough in sharing community level activities with eternal happiness of mind. The kinds of practices bring them close to feel the aspirations of fellow workers and they can refine their skills and competence through certain participatory interactive phases of experience based learning.

**Wholeness**

If we aspire for any solution to a problem, our mind often start moving here and there restlessly in search of immediate solution to any prevailing problem. Gandhi maintained his confidence to such an extent that he has given more importance to constructive works than to the freedom struggle. Dr. J. C. Kumarappa, a Gandhian economist, jotted down all the aspirations of Mahatma for reviving rural industries and planning for involving rural youths in the process of productivity. Kumarappa was optimistic in the achievement of success through the planned revival of the rural industries. Similarly, Lanza brought the concept of involving maximum number of people in the production system and implemented the same in the Community of Ark. It sets aside a great example of sustainable economic activities having enough scope of Nature Nurture and community based productivity mechanism. He was not waiting for any response from the regional government or from any other community because of his adequate faith upon the principles duly planned in accordance to the ideals of Mahatma.

**Winning the Heart of the Opponent**

Response to any violence or oppressive acts should not be expressed through violence or oppression. It cannot cultivate our aspiration of sustaining a peaceful community living or to resolve the community level conflicts. It can give birth to another violence of some greater degree and of greater extent. Killing cannot resolve the spread of violence. Holding the real situation and worshipping truth can ascertain the aspiration of people letting them to accept the progress of other fellow partners of the community. Anger and hatred duly cultivated in the human mind for a long time can bring a halt to the system by plotting some substantial blow upon the progress and prosperity. Players can play a game with better enthusiasm only in the presence of a strong opponent. Here in the phases of community living such situations often come that seeks the implementation of some collective decision regarding supporting or opposing certain acts and conducts.

A broader spectrum of the implements of a community living on the bases of principles of peace and nonviolence is awaiting sanctions of various economic houses and power seeker organisations. It came up with certain collective verdicts of imposing sanctions upon smaller segments of the world where a gambling between commitments and implements is in progress since the birth of the United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations coined various aspects of implements in its resolutions. Resolutions are to be adopted by the member nations for bringing forth the opportunity of development for all. First and the foremost threat this goal should face will be in the form of power gambling initiated by Nations and community seeking Nuclear Power. It is also an example of the diverting science and technology towards mechanizing warfare. If any joint concern appears for tackling the threat of terrorism and violence, then there should be unanimity amongst implementing agencies for ascribing the guarantee of peace and justice to common people living in the world.

Cross Border Terrorism is another aspect of set back towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals because of the lack of any direct control upon people working as master minds in the kind of oppressions. Because of the strategic location, India is facing such problem
since independence. Knowledge base of people involved in such conduct is not ready to move across the process of dialogue and peaceful resolutions. Diffusion of such terrorism is possible only when any peaceful resolution fits in the minds of terror seeking people and they give up their hatred.

A Spin between dos and don’ts

Highly Nuclear powered nations like USA and Russia came under the process of START treaty for agreeing upon the further reduction in their power potentials duly aimed towards destructions. Such kind of initiatives will be welcomed to initiate an effort of establishing peace and harmony in a broader spectrum. There are other instruments of tackling the terrorism and brute forces of the world through imposing series of sanctions duly resolved with the concern of member nations. If the START\(^{34}\) (reduction and limitations of Strategic Nuclear Arms)\(^{35}\) stops in the middle without highlighting adequate success in bringing the disarmament in reality, then all brute forces again entangle with shelter of some of the nations or of any specified community. A proper touch of development, access to resources and opportunity to work can diffuse the prevalence of the tension of terrorism and violence throughout the world. Human apprehensions always imply priority upon self-ascribed wants and never upon the collective needs. It is another aspect responsible for the prevalence of interpersonal conflicts and unrest.

What communities do during prevalence of any tension or unrest? Whom the communities approach during the phases of turmoil? What are the actions that we often depend upon states to consider for? Up to what extent the judiciary and law protect us from external threat and oppression and safeguard our aspirations? The answer is only one. If we compete in exercising our effort to impart ourselves in the decision making and law making process, then the Statehood and Nationhood will be a suffice in protecting our aspirations and safeguarding our development initiatives. We know that one can kill an individual, but killing any community is not the subject of violence, oppression, terrorism or brute forces. Community of Ark has set aside such example of an empowered people exercising their duties and rights with great vigil, will power and enthusiasm. It is possible through the path of empowerment preached as well as practiced by Mahatma and also implemented in France with great courage by Lanza del Vasto through the Community of Ark. The name Shantidas given by Mahatma for Lanza del Vasto is perfectly fits to reflect his aspirations and will power.

Notes and References

1. May there be peace in the heavens, peace in the atmosphere, peace on the earth. Let there be coolness in the water, healing in the herbs and peace radiating from the trees. Let there be harmony in the planets and in the stars, and perfection in eternal knowledge. May everything in the universe be at peace. Let peace pervade everywhere, at all times. May I experience that peace within my own heart.

   —Yajur Veda (36.17)

2. “O Lord! Thou art our Father and Mother, Thou art the only refuge of all, as Thou art the bestower of everything for our survival. We bow our heads to seek Thy blessings. —Rig Veda 8.98.11

   Blessed are the eyes that cast the affectionate glances at others. The Vedas teach us that all are our friends, none is our enemy. Love begets love and hatred breeds poison and contempt. Atharva Veda 19.15.6

   The Ten characteristics of a person who upholds Dharma are: Patience, Forgiveness, Subjugation of Senses, Maintenance of Purity, Sensual Discipline, Acquisition of Knowledge and Wisdom, Abstinence from stealing, truthfulness and emotional and sensual discipline. If all human beings
follow these commandments of Vedic Dharma there will surely be complete peace and harmony in the world. All that sustains the life of all the creatures on Earth is Dharma. Essence of Dharma is Humanity *Manurbhava* – *Rig Veda* 10.53.6 and Nobility *Aryatva* – *Rig Veda* 9.63.5

3. The term Vedanta stands for the end of Veda, the holy scriptures of Vedic Period of Indian History that describes the Philosophy, beliefs, rituals and cultural practices of Vedic People. An elaborated source that reflects the Philosophy in particular.

http://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_1/lectures_and_discourses/the_vedanta_philosophy.htm

4. Refer the book titled *Patanjal Yoga Pradeep* written by Patanjali.

5. *Yama* represents a series of ethical rules to be followed by a person aspiring for a yoga based life. Nonviolence, Truth, Non-Stealing, Chastity, worshipping the almighty and the virtue of non-possessiveness, non-grasping or non-greediness are the aspects of the Yama duly reflected in the *Ashtanga Yoga Philosophy*.

Refer G. K Devanand, *Teaching of Yoga*, APH Publishing, p. 45. Yama is a "moral restraint" or rule for living virtuously. Ten *yamas* are codified in numerous scriptures, including the Hatha Yoga Pradéepika compiled by Yogi Swatmarama, while Patanjali lists five *yamas* an five *niyamas* (disciplines) in the Yoga Sutra.


7. Lanza del Vasto (1901-1981) was an Italian aristocrat deeply concerned about this violence. Gandhi gave Lanza a new name Shantidas, “Servant of Peace.” He was a philosopher, poet, artist, catholic and nonviolent activist. He worked for ecological activism, nonviolence, spiritual advancement and collective progress in Europe. During his stay at Sevagram Ashram with Mahatma Gandhi he had observed the essence of peace and nonviolence in daily life. Bearing such noble thought impregnated with the beauty of Home Rule, he formed the Community of Ark in France. *Return to the Source* was his best compilation that reflected the Vision he imbibed in his intellect. His original name was Giuseppe Giovanni Luigi Maria Enrico Lanza di Trabia-Trabironte.


9. See *Peace Magazine*, June July 1990, p. 16

10. Community living of the Ark reflects the moral and ethical principles similar to that projected by Mahatma Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*.

11. Dr. J. C. Kumarappa, was a leading Gandhian Economist.

Refer his classic work *Economy of Permanence*, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakasahan, Rajghat, Varanasi 1984, p 208

12. Dr. J. C. Kumarappa, a well known Gandhian Economist, (Joseph Chelladurai Kumarappa) was born on 4 January 1892 in Tanjore, present-day Tamil Nadu, into a Christian family.

Refer Solomon Victor, *Jesus and mother economy* (New Delhi:ISPCK, 2007)


13. Community of Ark is the place where people put forth their aspirations in decision making and executing the same in all instances of daily life. Refer *Make Straight the Way of the Lord: An Anthology of the Philosophical Writings of Lanza del Vasto*, Knopf, New York, 1974. See also *Warriors of Peace: Writings on the Technique of Nonviolence*, by Lanza del Vasto, (Knopf :New York, 1974).


16. Satyagraha (the force that is generated through the adherence of truth). Refer *What is Satyagraha?* [http://www.mkgandhi.org/faq/17.htm]

17. Each person at the Ark works according to ability and receives according to need. No money is used within the community, and no Companion individually owns money—though money is available for such needs as medical treatment and transportation. The Companions also do not own individual property, except for personal items such as clothes and books. There is no economic basis at the Ark for placing one person above another. Refer Mark Shepard, *The Community of the Ark: A Visit with Lanza del Vasto, His Fellow Disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, and Their Utopian Community in France* (20th Anniversary Edition). (Friday Harbor, Washington: Simple Productions, 2011). A personal account of author's visit to the community.


21. On September 25th 2015, countries adopted a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years. Refer: [http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/]

22. The United States, Russia, the UK, France, China, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Israel all control some nuclear weaponry. Russia and the US share 93 per cent of all nuclear warheads, but they have been asked to reduce the number of weapons they have under the new START treaty (Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms). See: [http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/the-nine-countries-that-have-nuclear-weapons-a6798756.html]


24. The Ploughshares Fund, a global security foundation, estimates there are more than 15,000 nuclear weapons around the world; the U.S. and Russia possess 93 per cent of them. The former Cold War foes keep nearly 2,000 nuclear weapons at the ready for immediate launch against each other, according to the Nuclear Threat Initiative.


25. Nine countries together possess around 15,000 nuclear weapons. The United States and Russia maintain roughly 1,800 of their nuclear weapons on high-alert status — ready to be launched within minutes of a warning.


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