
UNIT 1 WHAT IS PEACE?

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 1.2 Defining Peace
- 1.3 Types and Levels of Peace
- 1.4 Means of Creating and Sustaining Peace
- 1.5 Peace for What and How?
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 Terminal Questions
 - Suggested Readings

1.1 INTRODUCTION

I am convinced that a non-violent society can be built only on the foundation of harmony and cooperation, without which society is bound to remain violent. If we argue that this cannot be done it will mean that a non violent society can never come into being. In that case our entire culture would be meaningless.

Mahatma Gandhi

Peace is essential for individual well-being. Peace is an integral part of normal social life and relations. If peace is lost, man's existence loses its smooth, flawless tenor. With peace lost, man's equanimity, too, is adversely affected, if not completely lost. Uncertainty increases, doubt in man's capacity to cope with life's problems raises its ugly head, and social relations tend to be clouded with feelings of insecurity. It is not, therefore, surprising to find disturbed men begging for peace of mind and people in general hoping for the early return of peace if war breaks out. All this shows that peace is an essential condition for both the individual's personal life and social relations.

Despite the centrality of peace for a regular and regulated existence of man, historical writings have generally taken it for granted. Peace is not celebrated in historical writings. History has highlighted the disturbance of peace and the waging of war. The result is that it is violence that catches the eye of the historian; it is virulent wars that become topics of discussion in history; and it is the deeds of heroes that are told and retold in historical records. The historical record is generally written as the story of the rise and fall of empires, a chronicle of reigns, wars, battles and military and political revolutions. The essential fact that central to the process of production and reconstruction of any society are the bonding activities that prevent society to break apart is lost sight of. These bonding activities underlie the tasks of daily life. And daily life revolves around raising and feeding families and organising the work of production and of meeting human needs, interspersed with times of feasting, and celebration of human creativity in poetry, song, dance and art. It also consists of helping others and being helped by others in times of need.

If peace nourishes, sustains and enriches life, both personal and social, war destroys life,

impoverishes society and ravishes natural resources. However, the glorification of the warrior in history has a powerful effect on human psyche and self-image of man. It leads to viewing the struggle for power as the basic attribute and theme of human existence. Current high levels of reported local and national inter-ethnic and inter-cultural violence and high levels of military preparedness for interstate violence on every continent, confirms this view. Yet a closer inspection of the record of civilisational progress suggests a different basic model of human existence that underlines the possibility of a nonviolent and peaceful mode of living and integration with the promise to remove the spectre of violence and war and to clear the way, if not for Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace", then, certainly for durable and salubrious peace.

This model is that of a peaceful society which relies on peaceful methods of conflict resolution for preventing conflicts from becoming violent. Thus peace is at the heart of this model and in the hearts of the people as well. This is corroborated by the fact that the desire for peace is not only *sine qua non* of everyday life but also a universal aspiration. In the writings of secular and religious nature, the hope is expressed of a paradise, a *bahishta*, a *swarga* where peace prevails eternally and rivers of milk and honey flow perennially. Moreover, humankind has now reached a stage in which elimination of violence, especially massive violence, both for the humankind itself at times of war and for nature for supplying the needs of development, has become imperative. The stark alternative to peace is the impending extinction because of availability of destructive weapons. Since isolation is a practical impossibility, the problem of developing a violence-free society has become global.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- Definitions of peace and their distinctiveness
- The need for peace for developing a violence-free society
- The need of maintaining peace at the individual, societal and state level
- The means appropriate for sustaining peace.

1.2 DEFINING PEACE

Before a precise and definite definition of peace is attempted, it is necessary to clarify certain issues that prevent a clear understanding of what peace really is. Up until hundred years ago, peace as a subject of theoretical discussion was almost nonexistent. Peace was simply treated as a condition that followed the cessation of wars. Peace as an autonomous subject, not as an appendage of war, does not have a very long career. As *Encyclopedia Britannica (1911)* makes it clear, the subordination of peace to the main subject of war, at least in international law, was the main trend. When peace emerged as an autonomous subject and as an object of theory generating contemplation about a hundred years ago, certain other difficulties clouded its clear understanding, two of which need to be identified here.

There is no agreed upon definition of what 'peace' in reality means. This is evident from the fact that, broadly speaking, peace has been defined in two different ways: One, to equate peace with the absence of non-peace. Definitions of peace in terms of a condition opposite of war are ⁶what Rapoport calls "definitions by exclusion". ¹For example, peace has been viewed as "respite from war", quiet from suits or disorder, ²rest from commotion", etc. The range of definitions associated with the word "peace" does not give us any precise idea of what peace practically means. The question as to what kind of situation or social condition

can qualify for peace remains unanswered. The definitions inform us as to what peace has meant at various times or places to the people and what different scholars or compilers intend peace to mean. Peace is a value loaded term; people see different things at different places and times in the word 'peace'.

Two, in contrast to negative, descriptive definitions, there are positive definitions which posit a particular condition to be qualified by the term 'peace'. Positive definitions seek to remove the deficiencies that negative definitions of peace suffer from. For example, the reference to the absence or cessation of war concretely means the absence of violence. However, the absence of violence, as Galtung observes, "should not be confused with absence of conflict: violence may occur without conflict, and conflict may be solved by means of nonviolent mechanisms."³ It is true that positive definitions do emphasise the primacy of peaceful, nonviolent means of conflict resolution. However, most advocates of peace and nonviolence are not clear about the goal which is envisaged to be realised through peaceful means.

The emphasis on peace and nonviolence does not, in a majority of cases, indicate what final condition or objective peace and nonviolence are to realise. Different schools of thought and groups of activists visualise different conditions that, for them, would signify peace. For example, pacifism, an important stream of philosophical thinking and a strong social movement, envisages the penultimate goal as the purging of the human psyche of aggressiveness, as rejection of violence by human individuals as means to whatever ends. Thus the end of the rejection of violence remains unspecified. In contradiction to this, peace advocacy emphasises organised action that is assumed to promote condition that would prove conducive to peace. These may range from massive demonstrations against threat of war or actual war to deterrence by massive armament.

The second difficulty relates to the question of perpetual or abiding peace. Supposing that violence has been banished and peace prevails. Does not this mean the freezing of a particular kind of *status quo* for eternity? But is not such a peace conducive to oppression and tyranny? To make a particular kind of *status quo* permanent is to block change at its source; the continuity of the same condition day after day assumes the status of a sacred value and becomes the paramount duty of everyone to defend *status quo*. The preference for a stable society rules out change; however, change is as important an attribute of man's existence as stability. Moreover, the very stability may create conditions which are favourable and good for some and unfavourable and bad for others. Such a situation is the seed-bed of conflict signaling the need to introduce necessary change.

If this signal is ignored, the way is paved for the explosion of violence. It is necessary not only to recognise the need for stability but also allow for the possibility of change. Unless this is done, peace becomes oppressive and may lead to the possibility of violence and war. Peace has been made into an absolute, a significant factor for its own sake. It is true that excessive flux is harmful. But it does not mean that it must be eliminated, ruled out forever. Rather, instead of being completely ruled out, one should aim at controlling it and regulating it. If peace is made an absolute, it will inevitably plunge mankind into the tyranny of war. The aim should be creative peace, peace that allows the process of shifting balance in movement. Thus peace is not a static thing; it is a supreme example of balance in movement. It is a dynamic thing.

1.3 TYPES AND LEVELS OF PEACE

If conflict cannot be ruled out even when violence and war have ceased to be an operative strategy, then undisturbed, continued peace depends on the degree to which the propensity

to use nonviolence for resolving conflict has taken firm roots. It is quite possible that this propensity may exhibit gradations; it may be nonexistent or may exist only weakly or may have become a firm and unshakable attribute of a social order. And since the social order and individuals, who form an integral part of it, are interdependent, the question whether any individual has this propensity fully, only partly or none at all will depend on the nature of the social order or group of people at any level of collective existence. These two aspects of the question of peace make it possible for us to examine it from two perspectives: an axis formed by the relationship between negative and positive peace, on the one hand, and the means used to resolve conflict, on the other. The other perspective involves the relationship between peace and levels of collective human existence.

Two different kinds of peace can, following Galtung, be identified here: one, negative peace and the other positive peace. Negative peace refers to the absence of organised violence between human groups at any level of collective existence, while positive peace underlines a pattern of cooperation and integration between major human groups. And since the possibility of conflict does not rule out the possibility of the use of violence for resolving conflict, the relationship between conflict and means of its resolution yields four fold classification of relations between human groups: war, that is organised group violence, *negative peace*, where there is no violence but no other form of cooperation either; *positive peace*, where there is some cooperation interspersed with the occurrence of violence; and *unqualified peace*, where absence of violence is combined with a deeply ingrained pattern of cooperation. Since the situation of war is not peace, it is of no interest for this discussion.

There are various levels of collective existence at each of which peace becomes necessary for any society to be qualified as peaceful. At the primary level stands the individual, who is driven by the need to live in a group not only to assure his survival but also to make his life materially comfortable and psychologically contented and happy. Groups, however, vary in size and quality; they range from a nuclear family to the entire world. This variation can be seen to yield, for our purposes, mainly three levels: the level of human groups, for example, peasants, dalits, army, etc. and the level of the international system of nations. Galtung talks of the emerging level of the world state. However, since it is still in the womb of possibility, it does not concern us here.

Each of these levels can be and usually is afflicted with unrest, tension and not infrequently conflict and violence. The occurrence of this situation demands action, both ad hoc and institutionalised, for correcting it and restoring peace. As such, it is necessary to identify both the reasons why a situation of non-peace comes into being and how this situation can be satisfactorily amended. At the individual level, if a person is experiencing inner conflict, for example, between what to do or not to do, ⁴he may engage in aggressive behaviour with a view to releasing his tension. Such a conflict is essentially moral and can be induced by both moral and non-moral, that is, economic, social, etc. factors. But all these factors boil down to the question of doing or refraining from doing something.

At levels higher than that of the individual, there are two levels where peace should not be allowed to lapse. The first level consists of major human groups that we know as nations or nation-states. Every state harbours within its borders a plurality of groups differentiated on the basis of race, language, religion, socio-economic status, political convictions, regional identity, etc. Two things need to be noted about these groups. First, any one of the factors mentioned above can become the basis of group formation. What is important in this connection is the degree of relevance that each of these factors assumes in a particular sociopolitical situation. That is why the vantage point from which persons view their environment becomes a crucial

ground for the formation of a group. As such, the ground for the formation of groups is, therefore, variable because of the situational context making a particular factor quite relevant for group formation.

Second, diversity is the characteristic of all societies, including the emerging world society. Diversity, however, is not in itself a factor of major importance in the disturbance of peace. What makes it important is the politicisation of diversity. And the feeling of being discriminated against in respect of access to various societal resources causes politicisation of diversity. The feeling of discrimination is engendered when inequality in the distribution of resources induces a strong sense of deprivation. Attempts to remove deprivation provoke resistance on the part of those who are fortunate to have more of wealth, power and prestige than others. This resistance creates tension and tension tends, in due course, to graduate into conflict and violence. Thus inequality in the distribution of such societal resources as wealth, power and prestige is one of the potential factors in the formation of groups leading eventually to the politicisation of traditional referents of identity formation. When groups form and situations make them oppose each other, it becomes quite clear that the various groups do not share anything in common except the fact that they share the same habitat.

The loss of commonality is indicative of the fact that any issue can become politically relevant because different groups tend to view it from their own differential vantage points. A political issue can become contentious if a sense of unfairness and injustice pervades the collective psychology of groups. And a contention of the emergent conflict is delayed or impeded. Such a contingency strikes both national society and the world system of international relations. However, what needs to be re-emphasised is that diversity in itself does not pose any threat to peace; what poses threat to peace is the politicisation of diversity, which is caused by the strong perception of deprivation by different groups.

In the case of national societies, the disturbance of peace affects in a major way only those within their boundaries. In the case of the international system of nations, such a situation affects a large number of people in different parts of the world. In the cases both of national societies and world system, the root causes are (1) the claims of entitlement either in terms of conserving what one has or a 'right' that is, the claim to something and (2) the ambition to get more than what one can rightfully claim to be one's own. As long as inter-personal, inter-group and international relations are based on the principle of moderating the desire for obtaining ever more control over societal resources, social life and relations remain peaceful. But when the limits of moderation are crossed, conflict and violence result. In the Indian tradition, the eruption of violence is seen to be grounded in the subservience of *dharma* (righteousness) and *Kshatra* (power). Such subservience makes power free of all controls and, as a result, it becomes self-aggrandising.

Such is the case in modern times because the centrality of the fulfillment of ordinary life needs concerned with the acquisition of wealth, power and status has pushed spirituality and morality to the background. As a result, power, which emerges as the primary means of safeguarding what one has and what one wants to get, comes to the fore. And the meaning of power in this context is to bend others to one's own will. We can see the interplay of power in all societies today. The search for what Mahatma Gandhi calls "bodily welfare" has pitted man against man, one class against another and one interest against another. The result is widespread tension, conflict and violence. It is this situation that Alasdair MacIntyre depicts as "civil war carried on by other means".⁵

In the case of the world system, the possibility of occurrence of organised violence is enhanced by two additional factors. One, states differ widely in size and the endowment of natural and

other resources necessary to generate and consolidate power for assuring security. Their continued viability depends on the goodwill and diplomatic and strategic considerations of major powers. And, two, in the anarchic situation of the international relations, self-help happens to be the most reliable means of survival. Self-help requires building, consolidating and extending power base through annexation of territories for the augmentation of resources. These two factors, when combined with the tendency of self-aggrandisement, create a situation in which military-industrial competition (due partly to build strategic industries for national security) has been a key driving force in developing the productive powers of the system, as well as its horrific destructive capacity for total war.

The two great world wars were the result of this situation. The stalemate in force, created by the development of nuclear weapons, has removed the threat of total war. Yet localised small wars continue to take place. The breakdown of peace followed by violence anywhere in the world carries very harmful ramifications for the people. The expansion of economic activities has brought different countries closer together and inter-linkage between them has become very dense. Consequently, if something happens in one part of the world, its impact can be felt in the other parts. Such a situation makes peace very essential.

1.4 MEANS OF CREATING AND SUSTAINING PEACE

Peace is essential for sustaining a normal tenor of life, a life free from tension and conflict. The disturbance of peace at any level identified above is likely to have a larger impact no matter where it is broken. If a person loses peace of mind, others in his immediate and mediate environments are sure to be affected in varying degrees. If a society is disturbed and is in turmoil, its members are adversely affected in various ways. And when organised violence erupts at the level of the world, the lives of the people all around the world are adversely affected in numerous ways. These three levels are differentiated by the scope and the extent of the impact that the disturbance of peace creates. However, whenever peace is broken, it is broken because of the failure of the mechanism of reconciliation and compromise that is set in operation whenever the possibility of conflict becomes visible. Even after the peace has been broken, attempts are made to quickly restore peace and let the normal life of everyday run its smooth course.

Given the central importance of peace for human well-being, certain institutionalised mechanisms for keeping peace and for foreclosing the possibility of its breakdown have been in place in all societies. These mechanisms have different forms and characteristics depending on the level at which they work. For example, in the case of the individual the most notable institution has been religion. Traditionally, religion was relied upon to help individuals to achieve and maintain inner harmony. Every religion underlines the necessity of self-transcendence which can be facilitated if the individual believes that he must identify himself with an entity, God, some higher principle, some larger human groups, etc- and acts in different life situations guided by this belief. Since anything larger than the individual but falling short of the divine entity is discriminatory and divisive, loaded with the possibility of conflict, every religion stresses some divine entity as the focus of man's identity, truth, meaning and value.

Belief in some divine entity induces a nurturant attitude towards fellowmen and nature; helps in the installation of certain social institutions endowed with the authority to judge and control individual motivation and behaviour and regulate interpersonal and inter-group relations. Religion is something from which springs forth "a cluster of identities, attitudes, values, beliefs and institutional patterns that lead people to live nurturantly with one another and the earth itself without the aid of structured power differentials, to deal creatively with their differences and

share their resources".⁶ However, with the ascendance of modernity the role of religion in man's life has considerably declined with the result that psychoanalysis is now increasingly seen to be an effective instrument of reducing, even eliminating, aggression as the source of conflict. Thus the psychologist's couch has replaced, to a very large extent, the place of worship.

The primary role of religion is to forge a compliance system that is reflective of and represents the normative aspect of a social order. Normative compliance system means simply that there is an internalised desire to comply; behaviour that is institutionally necessary is internalised as a need disposition in the personal system. However, the normative system proves ineffective in many situations. Therefore, it becomes necessary to supplement and / or reinforce it at the societal level by legal and political means. Legal measures involve coercion, while political measures represent certain principles legitimising certain practices for settling differences arising out of claims and counterclaims that involve certain entitlements. Even while the law aims at outlawing violence as a means of settling differences, its end result is coercion which is taken recourse to with the hope that it will educate people in right conduct.

Even political institutional means of ensuring compliance with the proper course of conduct, involve threat of coercion by a centralised political authority. In contradistinction to normative and coercive means, there is social control, which is said to be non-coercive. This method is trade or contract. Trade or contract is supposed to be an effective means of achieving integration of people and places and, as integration progresses, peaceful relations among the people concerned are supposed to prevail. Social control based on trade is relatively free from internal violence, either overt or structural. Contractual relations are based on *quid pro quo* and it is profitable to comply with the terms of the contract. As a matter of fact, contractual relations are supposed to cultivate the virtues of honesty, tolerance and modesty, virtues that are the fountainhead of non-violence.

These methods of securing compliance pertain largely to a society. At the level higher than the national political unit, the methods of maintaining peace involve four major institutional mechanisms. These mechanisms concern relations between nation-states and are supposed to promote peaceful relations among them. These mechanisms are balance of power, hegemony, disarmament, and some kind of world organisation. Balance of power takes its inspiration from the natural science principle of equilibrium. It signifies "...stability within a system composed of a number of autonomous forces. Whenever the equilibrium is disturbed either by an outside force or by a change in one or other elements comprising the system, the system shows a tendency to reestablish either the original or a new equilibrium".⁷

The equilibrium is maintained by the efforts of the states to mobilise power resources to an extent that are enough to deter other states from disturbing peace. This can be done either singly by a major power by enhancing its capacity to resist aggression and mount invasion or by different small or weak states through alliance. Contrary to this is hegemony which symbolises concentration of power in one nation or an alliance. Such terms as *Pax Romana* or *Pax Britannica* reflect a conjecture that peace can be kept by amassing power by one state or a combination of states. The assumption is that it will not only deter other states from attacking other countries but also that the hegemonic power will be able to penalise the aggressor. The possibility of punitive action, it is hoped, will help keep peace. Another method of preventing the disturbance of peace is disarmament. It is based on the assumption that if there are no lethal weapons, there is no possibility of violence, at least, organised violence. This sentiment is best expressed in the Bible, Isaiah 2:4, which says: "And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks...." With respect to international relations,

serious efforts are made to achieve disarmament, especially in view of the development of highly destructive weapons capable of achieving total destruction.

1.5 PEACE FOR WHAT AND HOW?

As indicated earlier, absence of violence should not be constructed as the absence of conflict. Nor does the commitment to save the mankind from the scourge of war promises to banish violence with regard to resolving conflicts. Even if the scourge of war is successfully removed, violence may be resorted to as long as the root cause behind the propensity to use violent means for conflict resolution persists. As the preamble to the UNESCO Charter declares, “Since war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”. But then, the question, “how the defenses of peace can be constructed in the minds of men?” must be squarely faced. Obviously, the foundation of such defences can be none else than inner harmony which is realised when the phenomenon of aggression, of the propensity to use violence, is rooted out of man’s interior.

This raises the question whether inner harmony can provide the firm basis for banishing war between nations. Galtung replies in the negative. He argues that “Wars between nations take place at the international level; this level is *sui generis* and requires analysis and reform at that level.”⁸ According to him, to make inner harmony as the basis of peace at the world system of international relations is a confusion of levels. However, one could observe that had aggression been becalmed and neutralised in the minds of Hitler and Mussolini and others of their ilk, wars would not have taken place. But Galtung is right in pointing out to the crucial importance of conditions obtaining in man’s environment for preserving and sustaining peace. Thus it is necessary to ask: What are these conditions that must prevail to allow peace a chance? But, then, we have to answer the final question in this connection: What end is peace to serve? It does not need any proof for the argument that peace is essentially a condition for man to enjoy the fruits of a good life. But, then, what is meant by good life?

It is this last question that forces us to see the need of the prevalence of compatibility between man’s interior and the external world as well as the crucial linkage between different levels of man’s world. It also makes it necessary to link the question of what is good life to Sorokin’s distinction between two types of cultural modes of living. The distinction that he makes between ideational / idealistic and sensate / materialistic types of culture has a great bearing on answering this question: What is peace? The basic difference between these two types of culture lies in the source from which a person derives the standard of his living. This standard can be derived from the nature of man himself or from a transhuman source that transcends the limitations of contingent human experience.

If the standard is derived from man’s nature itself, then, man turns out to be simply a body-mind complex. It is then the appetites of the body, that is, desires and their satisfaction that determines the mode of man’s existence. In the process of satisfying these desires man becomes externalised; this signifies that his material interest replaces man’s inner-being and he becomes the reflexive creature of external, largely material, objects which attract or repel him. He develops an instrumental perspective on the external world and treats it as one of potential means with a view to control. The need to control the external world makes power the central drive in life. With this, social life and relations are characterised by competition and the tendency of man to profit, as Rousseau puts it, by the misfortune of his neighbours. Pervasive competition to get ahead of others in the struggle of life breeds aggression in the minds of men and violence becomes one of the means of getting what one wants.

In contradistinction to this, the ideational / idealistic type of culture derives the standard of man's living from a transcendental source. This source, usually, the divine entity, engenders a belief system or cosmology from which are derived specific conceptions that are held and shared by the members of a society, both implicitly and explicitly, about the nature of humans, the world here and now, the world beyond, and the God and spirituality. Since all men are considered to be the children of God, there develops an attitude of respect towards others as well as the awareness of recognising and safeguarding their integrity. This is instrumental in building a strong linkage between individual and community interests; high identification with the community induces individuals and groups to give equal preferences to their own as well as the community interest. This induces a preference for joint problem solving; this, in turn, leads to the development of institutional devices for resolving conflicts through non-violent means. Thus there is an emphasis on the need of the restoration of social harmony and conflict avoidance. Through the process of enculturation, this cluster of beliefs and practices is passed on to future generations. As a result, the ethos of this culture is to suppress aggression and minimise the incidence of violence. That peaceful societies do even now exist is supported by anthropological studies.⁹

Trust and natural respect along with the respect of the right of others are some of the characteristics of a person who eschews non-violent means of resolving conflicts that arise due to differences in views. Such persons are the pillars of peace. By the same token, avoidance of violence and the recourse to institutionalised mechanisms of conflict resolution based on non-violence ensures peace as balance in movement. As such, conditions that sustain peace as balance in movement must constitute the necessary elements of a good life. These conditions of good life rely more on internal discipline than on external controls. And different measures used to sustain peace at different levels of human world fail to keep peace because they rely more, even exclusively, on external control.

1.6 SUMMARY

Peace is essential for individual well-being and is recognised as an integral part of normal social life and relations. With loss of peace, man's equanimity is adversely affected, and clouds the man's capacity to cope with life's problems as well as his social relations spreading in him a sense of insecurity. Peace is an essential condition for both the individual's personal life and social relations. Historical writings have focussed less on peace and more on war and recorded the events of the rise and fall of empires, a chronicle of reigns, wars, battles and military and political revolutions. Peace is necessary to nourish, sustain and enrich life, both personal and social. This Unit has dealt with a comprehensive meaning, types and conditions for peace to prevail and sustain it as well. Trust and the respect of the right of others are some of the characteristics a person should develop to eschew the non-violent means of resolving conflicts that arise due to differences in views. Such people and the non-violent methods ensure the continuance of peace.

1.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. The situation of non-war can be characterised as peace. Comment.
2. What are the different ways in which peace has been defined? Elucidate the merits and demerits of different definitions.
3. What are the different means employed to keep peace at different levels of human world?
4. What is the meaning of peace as balance in movement and how can this be ensured?

SUGGESTED READINGS

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