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Peace and Conflict Resolution in Tamil Tradition

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Abstract

Violence threatens to ruin the entire human civilization. every man attempts or intends at attaining peace both within him and with others. Peace is a state of power packed stillness and peace can also be understood as restraining oneself from talking and exposing oneself in the midst of the learned. Love is not merely an emotion but is in the form of energy which is transacted every moment. So, it affects all forms of life which grows with sharing. Moreover, Love helps us overcome the sense of fear and also promotes better understanding and appreciation. It must begin from oneself towards his/her parents, and grow gradually to include family, neighbourhood, country and lastly God. Water, when mixed with milk will become milk and does not remain water. The meanness of the mean will vanish totally when mixed with the dignity of the excellent. In the Tamil tradition, with reservations pertaining to the wicked, and the wrong-doer, does not speak of violence against them. Instead, it aims at peaceful co-existence even at such situations.

Keywords: Sathya Sai, Thirukkural, peace, God, humane society, violence.

Peace is the need of the society in today's strife-torn world with all sorts of distrust and doubts that are prevalent all over the universe and when violence threatens to ruin the entire human civilization. Of the five cardinal virtues - **Satya (Truth), Dharma (Righteousness), Śānti (Peace), Prema (Love) and Ahimsa (Non-violence)** - taught by ancient Indian wisdom, what is needed for the present study is the understanding of **peace, love and non-violence**. One can be sure that a **humane society** will be formed when once these are developed. It is very clear that every man attempts or intends at attaining peace both within him and with others. In fact, it is the end purpose of all human endeavours (SSSIO, in his discourses as presented in Sathya Sai speaks). According to Sathya Sai "If human values take root in the educational system, the emerging individuals will have the following attributes: they will want peace and justice in a world that acknowledges the rule of law and in which no nation or individual need live in fear; freedom and self-reliance to be available to all; the dignity and work of every

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person to be recognised and safeguarded; all people to be given an opportunity to achieve their best in life; and they will seek equality before the law and the equality of opportunity for all”.

Emotional equilibrium is a prime requirement for experiencing peace. As a result, internal emotional instability seems to be the prime factor in disturbing one’s peace along with (or more than) the external universe. The article cited here also suggests that “peace is a state of power packed stillness” (McKinsey and Company) and not mere stillness. R P Veerabhadrapa (2007) maintains that “the peace movement activists, be they arms controller or total disarmers, seemed not to believe in the possibility of a world without armies but were nevertheless working for it. Why? Perhaps, they felt that the situation is too dangerous for inaction”. The author, in another context, suggests that images of peace were in the background of every civilization while they were engaged in war. This means that war, on the one hand, looks inevitable, while people, on the other hand, aim for peace. How is this peace to be achieved? Or, how can peace be achieved while man’s tendency to war is also high? Couplet 320 of the Tirukkural states that pain rebounds on the pain-givers and not on the peace-lovers.

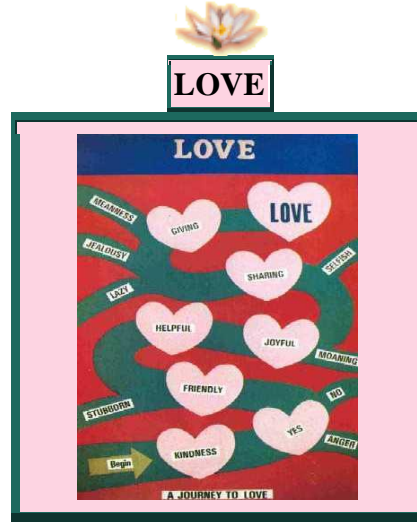
நோய்எல்லாம் நோய்செய்தார் மேலவாம் நோய்செய்யார்
நோயின்மை வேண்டு பவர் – 320

The essence of this couplet is that “he who wants to be free from pain should never give pain to others. Therefore, peace is not something that is earned but it is something that is natural to the one who is peace-loving” (S M Diaz, 2000). Furthermore, peace can also be understood as restraining oneself from talking and exposing oneself in the midst of the learned.

கல்லா தவரும் நனிநல்லர் கற்றார்முன்
சொல்லாது இருக்கல் பெறின் – 423

S M Diaz (2000) interprets this as follows: “even a man of limited knowledge, or of comparative ignorance, may expect to be adjudged as wise, if he is aware of his limitations, and does not open his mouth to speak and exhibit his ignorance in an assemblage of the learned”.

This is where the other virtue mentioned above, namely, love comes into picture. One can be rest assured that propagation of love clearly establishes emotional equilibrium. Love, therefore, is not merely an emotion. It is a form of energy which is transacted every moment. So, it affects all forms of life which grows with sharing. This is explained with the help of a simple diagram. Love in one’s heart is surrounded by too many distractions, no doubt. Yet, if the individual decides to love and express his love through its ingredients, then, he can keep himself untainted by the distractions. This diagram depicts love and its ingredients, like giving, sharing, helpfulness, joy, friendliness, kindness etc., (at the centre). This is surrounded by meanness, jealousy, laziness, stubbornness, anger, selfishness etc.



"How can one cultivate love (Prema)? Firstly, consider always the faults of others however big, to be insignificant, and secondly, consider your faults however small, to be big and feel sad and repentant. Whatever you do, with yourself and others, do it remembering that God is omnipresent. Endeavour every moment to be aware of the omnipotence of God."

The lines below the diagram teach how peace can be established. These lines (especially, the line – *consider always the faults of others however big, to be insignificant and secondly, consider your faults, however small, to be big and feel sad and repentant*) is reminiscent of the fact that self gets and forgets while love gives and forgives (Sathya Sai Speaks, 2010). Moreover, love helps us overcome the sense of fear. It also promotes better understanding and appreciation. It must begin from oneself towards his/her parents, and grow gradually to include family, neighbourhood, country and lastly God. Dr Annie Besant has identified peace in three ways – peace between man and man, peace between man and animal, peace everywhere and in all things (Kokila H Shah, 2001). Another value that helps and sustains love is that of non-violence in thought, word and deed (*ahimsa*). In fact, it can be highlighted as one of the pre-requisites for establishing peace. Take, for example, the declaration made by the UNESCO. This declaration goes as follows: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defense of peace must be constructed”. The practice of *ahimsa*, then, becomes an inevitable pre-requisite since it results in universal friendliness or to put it simply, **peaceful co-existence**.

One can find these values entrenched in Tamil tradition. The paper now wishes to highlight how and in what sense peace is understood in Tamil tradition. It starts with Avvaiyar talking of how one ought to behave with good and the bad (as found in the *Moodurai*).

நல்லார் ஒருவர்க்குச் செய்த உபகாரம்
கல்மேல் எழுத்துப்போல் காணாமே – அல்லாத
ஈரமிலா நெஞ்சத்தார்க்கு ஈந்த உபகாரம்
நீர் மேல் எழுத்துக்கு நேர்

நல்லாரை காண்பதுவும் நன்றே; நலமிக்க
நல்லார் சொல் கேட்பதுவும் நன்றே – நல்லார்
குணங்கள் உரைப்பதுவும் நன்றே; அவரோடு
இணங்கி இருப்பதுவும் நன்று

தீயாரைக் காண்பதுவும் தீதே; திரு அற்ற
தீயார் சொல் கேட்பதுவும் தீதே – தீயார்
குணங்கள் உரைப்பதுவும் தீதே; அவரோடு
இணங்கி இருப்பதுவும் தீது.

These poems tell how one must behave with people, be they good or bad. This is a valuable suggestion as it does not seek to indulge in the good or bad of others either positively or negatively. This is very much needed in man-to-man dealings in today's world. Take the first stanza – it talks of the nature of help rendered to a good man and a bad man – where the help rendered to a good man is equated with the writings on a stone while the help rendered to a bad man is like writing on water. The significant feature is that Avvaiyar has not suggested man to help the good and desist from helping the bad. She only talks of the effect of help rendered to both. The other two poems talk of (i) being in the company of good and (ii) why the company of bad should be avoided. One other poem of hers goes like this:

சாதி இரண்டொழிய வேறில்லை; சாற்றுங்கால்
நீதி வழுவா நெறிமுறையின் – மேதினியில்
இட்டார் பெரியோர்; இடாதார்இழி குலத்தோர்
பட்டாங்கில் உள்ள படி.

That is, she claims that there are only two castes among human beings – (i) **the highborn** who are the ones who help others in distress while (ii) **the lowborn** who are those that never help. Thus, Avvaiyar's poems speak of peaceful co-existence.

Nowhere, is she asking man to fight one type of men and exalt the other. In fact, history also has recorded how she was instrumental in warding off a major battle between two Kings, namely, Adiyaman and Thondaiman. This exposition leads to a stanza (172) from the great work in Tamil, Nāladīyār. It states:

அறிமின் அறநெறி அஞ்சுமின் கூற்றம்
பொறுமின் பிறர்கடுஞ்சொல்; போற்றுமின் வஞ்சம்
வெறுமின் வினைதீயார் கேண்மை, எஞ்ஞான்றும்
பெறுமின் பெரியார்வாய்ச் சொல் – 172

This means that one should know the path of virtue, bear with the harsh words of others, restrain deceitfulness, hate friendship of the wicked and always obtain instructions from the mouth of the great. Another stanza mentions two types of friendship with suggestion to follow one type and avoid the other. That is, one should avoid the friendship of those who exhibit the nature of elephants and seek the friendship of those who exhibit the nature of a dog. An elephant, when he is not in his usual sense, will kill his well-acquainted mahout while a dog will wag its tail with love in front of his master who has pierced it with an arrow out of anger.

யானை யனையவர் நண்பொரிஇ நாயனையார்
கேண்மை கெழி இக் கொளல்வேண்டும்; யானை
அறிந்தறிந்தும் பாகனையே கொல்லும், எறிந்தவேல்
மெய்யதா வால்குழைக்கும் நான் – 213

This stanza of the *Nāladīyār* and that of the *Moodurai* of Avvaiyar asks man to be cautious with the wicked, but does not suggest enmity with them. On the other hand, stanza 177 of the *Nāladīyār* talks of transformation of the wicked in the company of the good.

பாலோ டனாயநீர் பாலாகு மல்லது
நீராய் நிறந்தெரிந்து தோன்றாதாம் – தேரின்
சிறியார் சிறுமையும் தோன்றாதாம், நல்ல
பெரியார் பெருமையைச் சார்ந்து – 177

Water, when mixed with milk will become milk and does not remain water. Similarly, the meanness of the mean will vanish totally when mixed with the dignity of the excellent. Therefore, it can be claimed that the Tamil tradition, with reservations pertaining to the wicked, and the wrong-doer, does not speak of violence against them. Instead, it aims at peaceful co-existence even at such situations. The reason why *Nāladīyār* speaks like this is not far to seek when one looks into poem 30 of the same work, which talks of the non-attached manner in which a man is born in a family.

கேளாதே வந்து கிளைகளாய் இல்தோன்றி
வாளாதே போவரால் மாந்தர்கள் – வாளாதே
சேக்கை மான் ஒழியச் சேண்நீங்கு புன்போல
யாக்கை தமக்கொழிய நீத்து –30

Just as a bird enters the nest atop a tree and leaves it at will without seeking permission either to enter or to leave, so also, man is born in a family, makes relations, and on one fine day, departs (or dies) leaving the relations he has made. This verse highlights the triviality of conflict between men when one considers that his birth and death in a family is neither his making nor done at the behest of the other.

Does this mean that one must be resigned to fate as nothing is in his hands? Should he just be a mute spectator to what is happening through him? If yes, then, there is no meaning to his life. Such a birth is not necessary at all. Instead, man must indulge in virtuous acts, even if such acts be small in nature. Verse 38 compares the benefits of a virtuous act to the seed of a banyan tree. The seed of a banyan tree though exceedingly small, gives abundant shade to all when it grows into a huge tree. Similarly, the benefit accrued out of a small virtuous act, has the ability to cover the entire face of heaven.

உறக்கும் துணையதோர் ஆலம்வித் தீண்டி
இறப்ப நிழற்பயந் தாஅங் – கறுப்பயனும்
தான்சிறி தாயினும் தக்கார்கைப் பட்டக்கால்
வான்சிறிதாப் போர்த்து விடும் –38

Going by this verse, it can be concluded that the contribution of non-violence to mankind by all religions is nevertheless a great offering for posterity. Sri S. Sripal, former Inspector General of Police, Tamil Nadu, cites the words of Romain Rolland here: "... Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute". Non-violence is the greatest of human perfection and the highest of human achievements. The hallmark of this non-violence is that it is extended to all living and non-living things through its expressions of co-operation, respect, justice and equality as suggested in the diagram given hereunder.

NON - VIOLENCE



The same is true of the other two virtues, love and peace. Practice of non-violence coupled with absolute love has a greater influence for ever-lasting peace. It may be observed that the paper has highlighted on individual purification. This is done with the firm belief that individual purification can help in providing greater good to the other. However, one may not be able to see the results directly and instantaneously. But that should not dampen the interest of all. An anecdote along with a song composed by Avvaiyar can be taken here as providing the much-needed assurance. Avvaiyar, as a 4-year-old, had completed a poem on gratitude brought to her father's notice. This poem was originally brought by a poet with a request for completing the poem. The line goes like this:

நன்றி ஒருவர்க்கு செய்தக்கால் அந்நன்றி
என்று தருங்கொல் என வேண்டா

Meaning: when will an act of goodness beget results? Saying so, the poet told Avvai's father that he is not able to complete the lines. Avvai immediately joins the conversation and with ease completes the poem thus:

நின்று தளரா வளர்தெங்கு தானுண்ட நீரை
தலையாலே தான் தருதலால்

That is, acts done in time of need, however small, will pay off like the coconut tree that gives benefit carrying on its head, though you pour water to its feet. However, Indian tradition does not ask man to help the other with the end result in view. Instead, man has to pursue his action with the sole aim of peaceful co-existence and through the practice of absolute love and non-violence. The result will come automatically (or shall we say, RESULT HAS TO COME).

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7. The author also cites the following verses from the Old Testament
“He who diggeth a pit shall fall into it” – Proverbs 25:27
“He who sows injustice shall reap a calamity” – Proverbs 22:8
From the New Testament
“The measure you give will be the measure you get” – Matt. 7:2
From the Holy Koran
“Wrong not and ye shall not be wronged”
8. Ibid., p. 450-1
9. Sathya Sai Speaks, vol. 3 ch 38
10. Kokila H Shah (2001): Nyaya & Jain Epistemology, Published by S.C Research Institute, Ahmadabad 2001.
11. Kokila H. Shah, “Role of Jainism in promoting culture of peace” downloaded from <http://www.gvpwardha.in/documents/books/culture-of-peace/14.pdf> on 25-02-2013
“In Jainism, morality and religion, purity of self and spiritual upliftment is the same thing.
12. The latter was very proud of his armory and demonstrated it with pride to the saint hoping she would report its readiness to her friend Adiyaman. Avvaiyar, with her impish humor, praised him soundly. "Oh Thondiaman how different indeed are your clean and shiny weapons from those of Adiyaman, always stained with blood and under repair." The young king immediately understood that she had just warned him against taking on a battle-hardened veteran with only his inexperience and battle lust. War was off. The happy saint sang
13. This paper has used the verses along with meanings/interpretations as found in the work Nāladīyār uraiyudan (Nāladīyār with commentary) in tamil published by the South India Saiva Siddhanta Noorpathippuk Kazhagam, Chennai **downloaded from** http://www.omsakthi.org/essays/jainism_peace.html on 25-02-2013 **which claims that** the rishis, who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater geniuses than Newton and greater warriors than Wellington.
14. Another exhortation of the ancient Indian wisdom, espoused in the line “**Satyam bhrūyat; priyam bhrūyat; na bhrūyat satyam apriyam – that is, speak the truth, speak such truth in a pleasant manner; and do not speak the truth that is unpalatable,** shows what is to be done and how it is to be done.
