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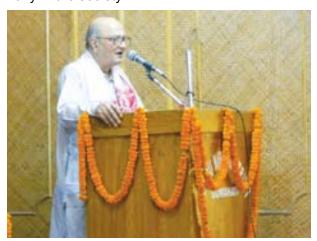


## Marching towards a violence free world...

The die-hard spirit of eminent Gandhian Shri Natwar Thakkar can be aptly described by Joaquim Millers poem, Columbus.

"Brave admiral, say but one good word: What shall we do when hope is gone? The word leapt like a leaping sword: Sail on! Sail on! And on!"

In an email interview with our Srinagar correspondent Iflah Javed Qureshi, the 81-years old Shri Natwar Thakkar stresses on the need for children and young people to work to work together to make the phenomenon of violence outdated. Shri Thakkar who continues his work of emotional bridge building by bringing together people of the North-East with the rest of the country feels young people need to do similar work to promote mutual respect and harmony in the society.



## Q. What do you think of the different conflict situations in different parts of the country?

A. Unfortunately our country is facing conflict situations at different places. These are:

- Most recent conflicts that have taken place in some districts of Bodo Territorial Autonomous District Council.
- 2. Skirmishes and disturbances in other parts of the North-East India, such as, Manipur, Nagaland etc.
- 3. Conflicts that occur in the wake of terrorist attacks, blasts etc. in different parts of the country.
- 4. The conflicts between security forces and the militants in Jammu and Kashmir spread over long years.
- 5. The conflicts between security forces and Maoist activists as well as between Maoists and general public.

Above five categories of conflicts are of major proportions which immediately come to my mind. There might also be occasional conflict of minor nature in different places.

I have been questioned above my thinking on these conflicts. There answer is that I feel very unhappy about these occurrences as

these are no doubt highly detrimental to healthy and harmonious progress in different walks of life. Secondly, these conflicts leave deep scars on the minds and hearts of the people, mainly the victims of violence. These must be stopped at the earliest. Government alone cannot stop it. All the enlightened section of society must join hands and create a climate against the use of violence for achieving any kind of objective. Violence is a means which cannot lead to good ends. Let us recall one of the most important teachings of Mahatma Gandhi where he says that for achieving any good end; the means should also be good.

#### Q How do you think these conflicts affect children and young people?

A. The conflicts badly affect children and young people. Their minds are vitiated and poisoned. In some serious incidents, children are the victim of serious trauma. In their sub-conscious they are bound to grow with the belief that violence and clashes are inevitable forces of life. Such influence on the minds of children and young people cannot ensure harmonious peaceful and progressive future of society.

## Q As we find increasing intolerance in the society, do you think the work for peace that you have been doing is getting lost?

A. I can describe my work as a work of generating climate of goodwill and healthy human relationship. It was no doubt limited to the state of Nagaland in particular and to the North East India in general. I have been working in this direction for nearly six decades by now. All that I can say is that, even after such a long period, which was no doubt a period, consisting of challenges, threats, difficulties and hardships. All that I can claim at this stage of my life is that I don't feel disappointed about my mission.

Finally, I firmly believe that any good work conducted with pure heart and with noble intentions never goes waste. It never gets lost. Although, its results may not be immediately visible, it does leave its impact on the hearts of the people, and the surroundings, in which one work with humility and full faith in the goodness of every human heart.

### Q How is the situation now and when you started work in Nagaland at the height of insurgency in 1950s?

A. The situation in Nagaland today is no doubt much better than what it used to be in the fifties. Many factors are responsible for this healthy outcome. I strongly feel that the functioning of democracy in the state with adult franchise is a very important factor responsible for this change. Additionally, various development programmes that have taken place, is another factor. The third factor is spectacular growth in higher education facilitated by the state.

Nagaland has not returned to full health yet. There are many difficult problems which the state is facing. Worst of all is the alcoholism and drug addiction. Voluntary social service organizations with enlightened and selfless leadership, free from pursuit of wealth and political power can help in a big way.

## Q What solution you would give to end the conflicts and disharmony in different parts of the country?

A. One of the primary duties of a state is the protection of lives and property of the citizens. Any conflict anywhere inevitably threatens the lives and property of the citizens. Hence, the first requirement to end conflict is to evolve efficient, alert and conscientious governance.

The second essential requirement of a democracy is the creation of moral restrain on state power. This can be achieved by the growth of large network of voluntary organizations all over the country which will be led by dedicated and selfless leaders keeping themselves aloof from pursuit of wealth and political power, but they will also have to be knowledgeable and alert watchdog of democratic functioning of the state. Creation of such a force can also ensure corruption free governance.

## Q. How do you think children and young people can contribute to peace? What is your message to the younger generation?

A. The children and young people can contribute to peace by learning to be respectful not only to their teachers and the elders of the family but also to their friends and classmates of their own age group. Cultivation of good manners during interaction with anyone else is

another quality which they must acquire. Thirdly, they must be sensitive to the suffering of others and be prepared to remove the suffering to the extent that they can. Last but not the least, is for children to avoid physical fights in any event. Instead of fighting, they should do group discussions and reasoning among themselves or to seek guidance and advice if the parents, teachers or any other elders.

My message to the younger generation is, never to forget that they are the inhabitants of a great country with extraordinary cultural and spiritual heritage that is India. India has many shortcomings, and we may also notice aberrations. Let us strive to get rid of the shortcomings and aberrations. Never forget that India is the land of saints and seers. It is also the land of the tallest man of the millennium, Mahatma Gandhi.

Let us clearly understand that with the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, and winning of freedom through non-violence, the phenomena of violence is outdated. The humankind in its infancy believed that violence was the final arbiter. Gandhi taught and proved that violence cannot be the final arbiter. Violence leads to counter violence and sets in motion the never ending vicious circle. Let us aim at creating violence free world.

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### Let's think and act for peace...

We shudder at the images, we feel terrified to see the unpleasant details and then... we turn the page over.

We turn to the advertorial segment, the more amusing news and the sympathy we felt almost a second ago slowly fades.

Each day as we read the newspapers or magazines or even the posters around the streets we are educated about conflicts around the world.

The horrific visuals and graphic details of the untold misery people especially children torn apart by meaningless conflicts and violence that the news channels and web sites dish out day in and day out disturb us.

While we may sympathise in angry debates, loudly voice our opinions in family get-together's or even provide seemingly obvious solutions, do we really associate ourselves with the people in conflict zones?

It almost seems unreal, constant gun fires, explosions down the corner preventing people in conflict ridden areas from going to school or to work.

So we tend to perceive people in conflict zones to be different from us.

What we fail to realise is that they are "real people".

While opposing forces fight over territory, resources or cherished belief systems, it is the innocent who are caught in the crossfire.

Trapped in their own land where they were born they find that land being stockpiled with weapons of destruction.

A land that they identify themselves with burn and struggle to restore a semblance of normality, it is the children who are the worst hit in conflict zones.

The wars, not only wipe out the present, but ruin the prospects for the future.

At an age when we are read fairytales, the children in conflict zones are snapped into the harsh reality and handed guns to join the war.

Away from school, learning and awareness these children are subjected to untold atrocities.

Emotional trauma, a state of constant unrest and a violent environ all snatch away their innocence and replace it with aggression.

This is the time to reach out to these children.

Are they really very different from us?

All of them are full of dreams like us, enjoyed their grandmother's stories like us or had hopes for a bright future like anyone of us.

We in our own little ways can do something to change the atmosphere of fear and hatred that breed conflicts and violence. This supplement of the Peace Gong is a humble attempt at that. Like war, peace also germinates in the minds of humankind.

It is for each one of us to make a world where we all think beyond the borders.

So let's think pro peace and root out war from lives around the globe.

Spandana Bhattacharya

### Live and Let Live

Some people say peace is normalcy. Others say peace appears when there is no violence. But the real meaning of peace is peace of mind. Peaceful living is the best living. Peace depends on the principle of Live and Let Live.

Whenever there is conflict in the society peace gets disturbed. Where there is violence, peace wants to escape. During conflicts, the most fragile sections of our society, children, the elderly and women become the worst victims. There are instances of child abuse and human trafficking become common.

Every religion encourages non-violence and we must obey these principles. Mahatama Gandhi was an apostle of non violence and that is why he succeeded in freeing India from British rule.

Peace begins from home. If our home is peaceful, neighbour is peaceful and if

neighbour is peaceful, the whole society can become peaceful. By nature, human beings love peace. So it is important that children start to imbibe peaceful attitudes right from a young age. Their education needs to make them think peacefully. Their environment should make them to learn the importance of peace. It is only then that as active citizens of the world they too can contribute to a peaceful world where there will be no conflicts.

Mohammad Asif Mir

## A Refugee's Story

I miss the lullabies and the cuddly hugs,

When my nights are ruined by hunger pangs and stinging bugs,

My father was murdered one morning when he left for work, A bomb blast occurred in the office where he worked as a clerk,

My mother was hit by a stray bullet as she went to buy grocery, There was no one who could do something against his atrocity,

My sisters were kidnapped and sold,

They were smuggled to other countries, that's what I'm told,

I was forced to stop going to school,

How will I become educated; will I be considered a fool?

I was brought to a refugee camp,

I'm afraid of this place at night because there is not a single lantern of lamp,

The food served is always unhygienic and insufficient, I wish my country mates can become more efficient,

During winters, I shiver all night,

Lack of proper covering allows cold wind to rush right inside,

Because of malnutrition and the cold, I'm going to die, Looking at my skeleton-like body, all nurses began to cry,

As night, I feel into a peaceful sleep at last as it started to rain, I flew to heaven to reunite with my family once again,

The war snatched my childhood, my innocence and life, And filled my little heart with grief and strife,

- Syeda Rumana Mehdi



### Universal peace through mutual respect

The

mistrust

Jharkhand

alarmed

organized

stories

violence and conflict

in Kokrajahar, Assam

were disturbing. With

so many deaths and

communities in the

region, students of

classXofAnandalaya

School in Madhupur,

interactions with their

peers and seniors

on the importance

peaceful

existence and non-

between

were

and



Children of Anandalaya School and Peace Gong members interacting on the importance of mutual respect for peace

Non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all-children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. When non-violence is accepted as the law of life, it must pervade the whole being and not be applied to isolated acts. – Mahatma Gandhi

violence.

During the interactions, it was generally felt that intolerance amongst communities was growing and this needed immediate attention. Why should the people of Northeast be forced to leave their place of work in Bangalore and Hyderabad and rush back to their homes? It was also felt that children

are the greatest sufferers of any conflict.

The students and our seniors felt that promoting mutual respect for each other was important to promote peace between communities. Children and young people have a great role as peace messengers and catalysts for imbibing respect for different culture and traditions. The students plan to organize more interactions to further tolerance and non-violence.

We in the Anandalaya School are friends, who come from different communities, languages and religions all having studied here at Anandalaya for 12 years of our lives, and studying hard to do well in our Xth Std. Do we want to go out into the tumultuous world outside? We wonder?

We are here Santhali, Muslim, Dalit, Brahman, Kol in our homes, but simply students in our school and to our teachers. Every week we have Sahitya Sabhas where we learn new things about our culture and about those of our friends, we sing and dance with each other and share our lunch. We have very similar joys and sorrows when

we do well or don't in the eyes of our elders. We feel and know that we are one as Indians and most importantly global citizens.

Recently some volunteer teachers from South Africa had visited our school. It was very interesting to learn about their language, culture, thoughts and hear their music. They told us about their struggles and how Mahatma Gandhi inspired Nelson Mandela to throw out their apartheid system. It is indeed disturbing for us in India, which is

known for its peace and tolerance worldwide and has never attacked another country in history, can actually attack its own people. After all, when we go to seek work, leaving our families behind, we are still working to serve our country's development and we are Indians, are we not?

We, students of Anandalaya and reporters of The Peace Gong in a remote part of the beautiful but economically backward state of Jharkhand appeal in ONE VOICE to one and all of our fellow citizens to become peace messengers in our own neighbourhoods building bridges of friendship wherever cracks are seen. We appeal to you to not let the demons of division enter your communities or neighbourhoods and follow the principle that we are following here in our school with unity through friendship, understanding and integration.

Class X students of Anandalaya School,

Jharkhand

## Burari Shishu Panchayat spreading peace



Members of Burari Shishu Panchayat in a training programme on conflict resolution

As part of its effort to promote peace in the community, the Burari Shishu Panchayat, New Delhi has been organizing several programmes. In one such initiative on August 30, 2012, the children discussed the unfortunate conflicts in different parts of the country. Members of different children clubs from World Vision, Gurgaon also took part in this interaction.

The children of Shishu Panchayat discussed the true meaning of peace and felt that it was never needed more than it is today. Every corner of the world is facing violence in various forms and people are looking for ways to establish peace and non-violence.

The children spoke about how there is unhealthy competition between developing and developed nations, and how it affects adversely the relations between people.

There is a violent atmosphere in the country as well as the world which erupts in various ways, killing innocent people. The political leadership is also driven by self–interest with no thought for the nation and its people.

The only way to peace all over is that we become the change ourselves that we wish to see in others. There will always be conflicts but they need to be resolved peacefully.

The children promised to become agents of change and work towards a peaceful society, state, nation and the world. Every drop in the ocean counts and the Shishu Panchayat children are committed to the cause of peace.

Sandhya and Sonu

(This story has been translated from Hindi)

# Teaching the values of brotherhood and fraternity

'World Supremacy' is every country's primary objective in their 'to-do' list.

Nuclear weapons, armaments and similar such things is the new universal dream.

They say, "It is the survival of the fittest." Fair enough.

What about the weak? How will they survive? Do they have to helplessly die and be a victim of this absurd theory? I think otherwise.

There have been many incidents in the past where young children are shot dead during times of war. The justification was well 'clearing the battlefield'. 'Merciless', one would say, 'justified' the other would remark.

And that 'another' is responsible for the many children who have fallen prey to man's imperialistic designs.

It is that 'another' that we need to dominate, that 'another' whose views we need to change.

There have been incidents in the past in the countries of Africa, Latin America and the Middle East where children have been provided with ammunition and encouraged to fight, completely disregarding the humanitarian attitude.

And who are these types of human beings? They are those who have been taught since their childhood to fight. So after all, this is a vicious cycle, which is destroying our world day by day. This apocalypse can be prevented if only we as human beings extend our support to these people and remind them the values of brotherhood, fraternity and humanity.

Neeladri Sengupta

#### NEED FOR PEACE CAMPAIGNS BY YOUTH

It is almost every day that we are fed with stories of violence from not only within the country but from around the world. Hundreds of people get killed in these conflicts. It is not a healthy trend for humankind- those who are directly involved continue to suffer for the rest of their lives and those who see or hear about these in far off areas also suffer directly or indirectly.

In the backdrop of what we are seeing in recent violence in Assam and elsewhere in the country, the worse sufferers in these conflict situations are children. Many lose their families, in many occasion the livelihood of their parents is finished, their education suffer. Most importantly as children are in an impressionable age, the minds of the young minds can be oriented towards good or bad. But what really determines the mind-set of them? It really is what they see around them. Once you see conflicts in the society through the eyes of the tender aged boys and girls, it makes them negative and even aggressive. They become desensitized to violence.

It is for this reason we all should work for peaceful co-existence amongst communities and groups as in conflicts all suffer. Revolt against violence of any kind is important. The youth has to take the initiative and organize extensive campaigns for peace. They should motivate the society to adhere to the Gandhian principles of non-violence.

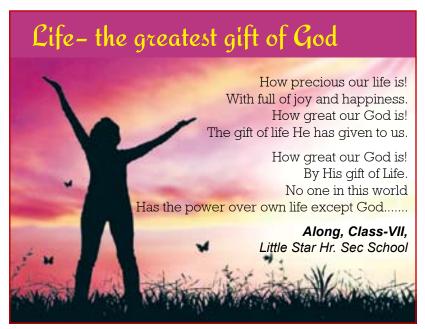
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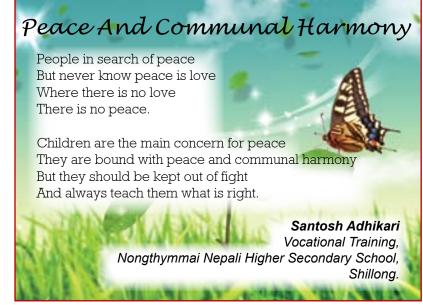


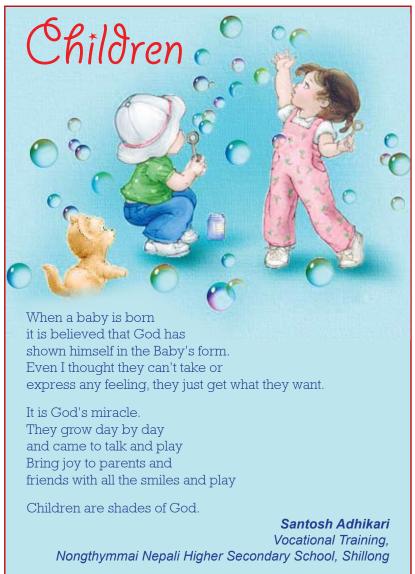
Smooth road never makes good driver Smooth sea never makes good sailor Clear sky never makes good pilots Problems free life never makes a strong person Be strong enough to accept the challenges of life Don't ask life "why me" instead "try me".

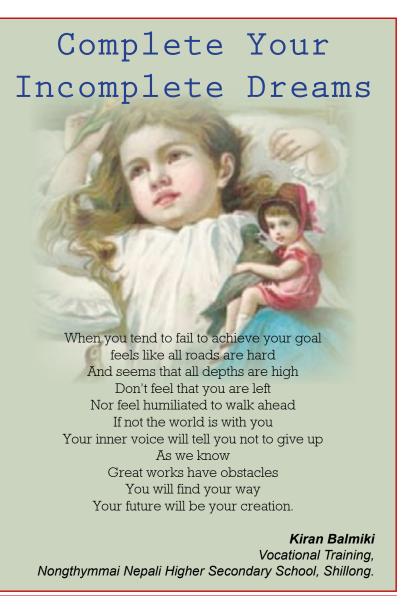
Lika Aye Class-XI, ZMHSS, Dimapur











#### THE COLOUR CULTURE

A little girl, she stood alone
Under the Earth's very own dome
And thought with a reluctant sigh
The need for a you and I ?!!
For yesterday there was no colour no creed
Today, we stumble, bound not free
Some white some red some brown some green
All different, and yet not so to me
So what is it, you tell me the colour of We
Oh that is simple enough for
Together, the colour culture, are we!

If I had the chance to paint the world, I won't paint it red or brown or black – I will paint it to be just as pristine as it looks today and remove the gray shadows of terror and violence. Where would I find that colour you ask me? Look inside you and the answer will be ready... I will paint it in the colours of you and me and us and we. I will paint the world in the colour culture!

Long ago man fought a war, a war that was started on colour and ended with colour. A war, that man is fighting ever since and losing miserably. Every war starts with a colour and ends with another.

The victor! The victor is neither black nor brown nor white. The victor is red! The war starts with the colour red, the colour of anger and hatred, and it ends with the colour red, the colour red that runs like water through the streets of humanity.

The colour red is the champion, the colour of so much grief and so many cries. If you thought that a war is the answer you are wrong for neither in victory nor in defeat, would you stand to be the victor when what you are standing on, is not the ground but the lives of a million families! Today, when we are 76 years from the First World War, I hope that the world can look around and learn to be the change. After all, it's almost as long as it takes the Haley's comet to reappear in the night skies. Surely if the comet can make a change in so long then so can we!

Today, we walk and talk technology! Our lives manoeuvre from the unexpected to the unknown. Today we have all come into virtual contact with each other and it is today that we need to forget the matters of the mind and settle the matters of the heart and soul!

As when I stand testimony to the changing sands of time, I can say in all truth that the world is turning around and I can see the world tilting. Now I can imagine the dilemma of Baron Pierre de Coubertin when he tried to design an Olympic flag that represented the essence of love, patience, justice and freedom... in short, the essence of a culture that united all other cultures.

His representation of five intertwined rings of different colors in a white field signifies, even today the need for the presence of a stronger sense of collective belonging!

It is not about the evolution of species, it is not about materialistic gains and it is definitely not about the changing needs of time. It is about realizing the need for something that is tired of waiting in our hearts. Let the world see your souls soar into the haven of love that resides in witnessing the joy of your brothers and sisters!

When a Hindu had tried to stop Gandhi from meeting a Muslim, he had said, "What do you want me not to do? Not to meet with Mr. Jinnah? I am a Muslim, and a Hindu, and a Christian, and a Jew, and so are all of you. When you wave those flags and shout, you send fear into the hearts of your brothers. That is not the India I want! Stop it! For God's sake stop it!"

Mahatma Gandhi was the first person to tell the nation that in unity we stand more powerful than those who ruled our land. They believed in the policies of divide and rule and they were elated to see a country that was already divided. You cannot do the right thing if you stand alone. You cannot block the tempest if it's just you standing in front of it. But you can change the direction of the tempest if you join hands with each other and stand together, a solid wall, in the way of the storm.

Nothing can be more frightening than the fear of losing all that you hold dear. And if truth be told, today I am scared. I fear the loss of the sanctity of love and peace in the name of culture which in itself is a testament of all that is good and somehow it really seems quite absurd that one might, even after globalisation has turned the world into a global village and brought down geographical barriers, actually let go of everything that is of real value!

You cannot tell a person to look at the truth when the truth stands in front of them. They have to see and learn to voyage through life trying as hard as they can to fill up the chasm that is a manifestation of the past and walk forth into a better future.

Charles Dickens had once said, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Today we stand on the crossroads of humanity and the future of mankind lies in the hands of the only two letter word that exudes in essence, strength and unity — a 'we'!

Looking at the way things seem today, I can't help but remember Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, when he told Gandhiji: "Bapuji, the whole country is moving" to which Gandhiji replied, "yes, but in what direction".

Somehow I think history manifests itself into the present in some way or the other because I can see people moving, but I need to hasten to ask them – in which direction?

I am not Mark Antony who could make all of Rome rise in rebellion with an, "Oh! what a falling was there..." and I am not Mahatma Gandhi who could make the masses rise in civil disobedience and create a Swatantra Bharat (Free India)!

I am a mere you and I am part of the 'we'. I believe that together we can change the world and as Gandhiji said: "The function of a civil resistance is to provoke response and we will continue to provoke until they respond or change the law. They are not in control; we are".

It has been a long time since we were colonised and a long time since we were freed. But somehow we are still shackled and colonised, not by tyrants and murderers, but by that part of ourselves that refuses to believe! It is now time to rise above and take a step or else the law of nature will be changed and changed not for the good but for the worse!

So I ask you to respond to my voice from within the crowd. I am asking you to join hands with me! Join me in trying to create a new flag for my Nation- the Earth! I am an Earthian and I want to paint my flag in the colour- culture! Will you join me in taking this flag to every corner of our Nation and help reinstate real peace in our world.

It is time to look around and see and to open our minds to the anguished pleas of a world that shall perish if we do not care to stop making the seen, the unforeseen!

The Peace Gong Bureau

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