

## LANGUAGE AS A PEACE-MAKER?

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**Received** on 15th October 2016, **Revised** on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016; **Accepted** 20<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2016

**ARTICLE**

*Key words: Education, Gita, Teacher Education*



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### **(1) Prologue:**

In this paper, I discuss the role of language in bringing about peace in the world. These are my own views based on my experience gained by working in the field of language education as well as teacher education. You may agree or disagree with them. I would very humbly welcome both. My purpose is to create a debate, an informed discussion and a discourse on whether language can be a peace maker.

### **(2).Language, Comprehension and Connectedness:**

I think language is our life. It is our oxygen also. We are lifeless without it. Our whole life depends on its type and its quality whether it be used at home, at job or in society in which we interact with family members, colleagues and people around us through language. We come to know people through language. The level of the knowledge of the world possessed by the people depends on the language used and shared by them.

I believe that the mother -tongue connects us with the people around us very quickly and comfortably. A second language also faces some difficult moments sometimes in such communicative settings. A foreign language may face incomprehensible moments and may not connect us as firmly and as comfortably as we do in our home- language or mother- tongue.

I am of the opinion that comprehension connects and incomprehension disconnects us with the world. Comprehension makes us happy while incomprehension disturbs us within and without. We may feel disturbed even in our mother- tongue if the other person uses bad, dirty, harsh, violent, unsuitable and unbecoming language. In such situations, we may become sad, unhappy and angry, and probably occasionally lose our temper also which would create a conflict situation. In fact, our reaction will depend on how our mind receives it, responds to it and deals with such emotions and feelings.

People generally use language to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings. They think in language and then act. Their thinking and behavior is reflected in their language. The verbal and non- verbal behaviors speak volumes for what they are thinking .Besides the verbal language, our body -language (our eyes, gestures, head and hand movements, etc.) display to the world what and how we are. Some people can pretend a false and artificial behavior for some time but they cannot do so for ever. The moment they return to their real ‘self’, their real character, their real face and their real personality emerge. The language (not a language) used by the person essentially immediately shows whether the person is peaceful or not or she/he is violent in behavior. If we wish to modify their undesirable behavior, we should teach them the language of peace. If there is no peace in the mind, there will be no peace in the behavior reflected through language.

To me, language is an experience gained in, around and through society. The better, richer and more acceptable linguistic experience we have, the better society we can make. Our language reflects the mood, the behavior and the character of the society we are living in. If we want some change in society, we should change ourselves first. Language has the potential to promote, facilitate and nurture peace. The language used in Satyug, Tretayug, Dwapar and Kalyug is the

proof of this. The three 'Guna'( attributes, qualities, characteristics ) including 'Satoguna', Rajoguna', and 'Tumoguna' also have a distinct language. The language of 'Sat' is the language of 'Truth', Light 'and 'Peace'. The language of 'Raj' is the language of 'Power' and 'War'. The language of 'Tum' is the language of Darkness, 'Violence' and 'Terrorism '

### **(3).Making Friends and Foes through Language:**

We can make friends and foes through language. The language of love makes people beautiful, benevolent, caring, compassionate, cooperative, dutiful, efficient, fearless, good, generous, holy, handsome, honest, ideal, joyful, kind, loveable, nice, optimistic, peaceful, pious, peaceable, quiet, reverent, spiritual, sincere, social, silent, and truthful. Contrariwise, the language of hatred makes people angry, bad, cruel, crooked, dubious, dirty, dishonest, demeaning, fearful, materialistic, pessimistic, provocative, ugly, unholy, unpalatable, unpleasant, ill-disposed ignominious , unwelcome, unreasonable, ill-mannered ,ungracious, unrepentant ,unruly, unsavory, bad-tempered, unscrupulous, unseemly, wild and violent.

Thus, we see that the language of 'love' is the language of 'peace' and vice versa. The language of 'hatred 'is the language of 'war'. Do we want to live in the world of peace or in the world of war? This would depend on the language we use. The choice is ours. Everything is in our hands. Language shapes our personal, social, educational, professional, emotional, cultural, spiritual and moral life. The language of the villainous Duryodhan (Kourav) is the language of hatred, anger, annoyance, cruelty, violence, conflict, tension ,destruction, annihilation, demolition, intolerance , war and doom. The language of Arjun (Pandav) is the language of love, peace, tolerance and coexistence. Rawan speaks the language of war but Vibhishan, his younger brother, speaks the language of peace.

In fact, war and peace reside in our mind only. Mind is where ideas generate, cultivate, grow, enrich, and survive. The ideas become positive and negative in terms of time, space and contexts. Good and holy ideas construct and preserve the world of peace but bad and unholy ideas destroy and dismantle the world of peace. However, essentially ideas are good but bad people turn them

into bad ideas. Ideas produce language. And language produces ideas. They both are interdependent and inseparable.

The language of Buddha, Mahaveer, Christ, Mohammed Sahib, Meera, Kabir, Gurunanak and Mahatma Gandhi is the language of love, cooperation, co-existence, non-violence, tolerance and peace. The language of peace is basically the language of poetry.

#### **(4).The Language of Power**

Language is power. The Sanskrit language was the language of power in the Vedic and post-Vedic period. Similarly, Persian, French, Latin and a whole lot of other languages in different periods of time and space have occupied a prominent political, economic, social, cultural, administrative, religious, educational position. The language of the king, queen emperor or empress, Raja or Maharaja was essentially a language of power with enviable magnetism to attract every possible attention, care and support. The classical/traditional literature in every language contains adequate evidence in support of the above statements. The language of today's bureaucracy has taken the same route. Their colonial-mind set is still a major concern. The lower stratum of the society, the underprivileged, disadvantaged, indigenous people and the common people have been threatened by the extra ordinary power the so-called 'world language' (English?) has acquired or snatched.

The language of power is the language of ego, violence, domination, colonial mind- set. It is repressive, undemocratic and destructive. The language of power may live for some time but it may not survive for ever. Capitalism is the language of power. Machiavelli is right in saying that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Corruption is the end of value –laden and value- based world. Corruption is violence in its economic form. We require peace dividends. Social cohesion, harmony, love and peace correlate strongly.

**(5) Language of Terrorism:**

Is it not because of political reasons that some misled people have started using terrorism as a weapon against the modern 'Omnipotent'? What language do these terror outfits use? Is it not a language of violence, threat or annihilation? Does language not give them 'obsolete power'? Or is language not an absolute power with them? Can there be peace in the world with the people speaking a violent and threatening language? It is an open secret that some people are forced to speak a violent language because of political, economic and cultural reasons. How can there be tranquility and peace in the world if the people are not at peace with them internally? External peace is said to be the manifestation of internal peace. Something disturbing us internally will definitely get reflected in our verbal and non-verbal behavior. Language is a medium of expression of our internal behavior whether powerful or violent.

**(6) LPG and Terrorism**

Unfortunately some misguided youth and people are speaking the language of terrorism. I suspect the LPG movement is adding fuel to the fire by creating more disparities, inequalities, etc. People are gradually but steadfastly becoming monolinguals (and using a so-called global language) and have started adopting a monoculture (which is largely occidental). The world is losing its multicultural identity. The control by a superpower over all resources of the world causes a quick change in people's perception resulting in the emergence of the language of terrorism which cannot be fought and defeated by weapons of mass destruction. I believe that this beast of terrorism can be tamed only by the language of love and peace. Political power will have to accept this harsh reality.

I understand that there is a strong relationship between terrorism and monolingual and monocultural character of the world. Politicians across the world have to let diversity prevail, sustain and grow for a better and more peaceful world. I strongly believe that multilingualism and multiculturalism are the essential and integral components of life and are the best phenomena of the world which need to be protected and nurtured at all cost for peace in the world.

People keep pets like dogs, cats, parrots, pigeons, etc at home and ‘talk’ to them. Do these pets understand English, French, Spanish, German, Hindi, Gujarati, Telagu , etc .? No, they do not. But these pets understand the language of love, trust, compassion and peace. Therefore, they are friendly with us. The stimulus –response theory acts here.

### **(7) Language and Education**

In my considered view, no education is possible without language. Obviously, education and language go hand in hand and are thus inseparable. If there is no correspondence between language and education, there can neither be language nor education. The language of true education is the language of love, harmony, sociability, tolerance, non-violence, coexistence, compassion, social cohesion, cooperation, mutual trust, universal truth, honesty, secularism, equality, freedom, fraternity, and peace. The ultimate goal of true education is peace. And the goal of true language is also peace. Thus, language and education are synonymous as they have a symbiotic relationship.

### **(8) Peace through the Chemistry of Language**

I think peace is also possible through language which consist of phonetics( sounds ), grammar ( rules of word and sentence formation), semantics( meaning) and pragmatics ( the use of words and sentences in contexts ). Every language has a certain number of sounds, structures, grammar and semantics. Broadly speaking, every language has more or less the same sounds, the same patterns of communication styles, skills and the same chemistry of vocabulary, grammar and usage. The combinations, arrangements and organization of these elements may be different. We should educate the people around us that all the languages in the world are the one and the same in the sense that they all have sounds, words, sentences, meanings which are used in certain contexts for the same goal, that is, communication. If people are educated about this uniqueness and universality of languages, there will be no language- controversy, no linguistic- conflicts, no division of geographical boundaries, no polarization, and no war of identities but PEACE only.

### **(9) Peace through the Medium of Instruction**

Children learn best through the home –language or the mother tongue. If children are forced to learn through a language which is different from their home language or mother tongue, their peace is disturbed by negatively affecting their whole personality and scholastic achievement. When at the secondary and higher stages of education, certain subjects have to be studied through a different language (second or foreign language) , then students generally become a prey to tension ,stress ,frustration and depression. This builds up disharmony in their life. This shows how their peace is immensely disturbed. Lack of internal peace sometimes unfortunately forces them to resort to commit suicide.

If a person is internally at peace, she/ he will think peacefully, hear peacefully, listen peacefully, speak peacefully, talk peacefully, eat peacefully, walk peacefully, read peacefully, study peacefully, work peacefully, reflect peacefully, sleep peacefully, dream peacefully and wake up peacefully. She/he will do everything peacefully. She/he will live peacefully and die peacefully.

### **(10) Peace is an Attitude**

In my humble opinion, peace is, in fact, an attitude. How we look at things depends on what our attitude is towards them. Positive attitude creates heaven and negative attitude produces hell. Language reflects our attitude towards the world. Language is a ray of hope for peace in the world. Let us welcome, respect and protect this ray of hope.

### **(11) Language and Internal Peace**

I think besides the other means, language could be a very important vehicle for peace provided people are peaceful internally. Thus, language and peace go hand in hand. Internal peace must get reflected in the way we speak or communicate. Positive ideas flow through peaceful language and negative ideas come out through violent language. Therefore, Rahim, a great ancient poet, suggests that one should speak a language which soothes everybody. Mohammed, Mahaveer and Buddha spoke the language of peace. Lord Krishna and Pandavas kept on

speaking a language of love, peace and harmony until the Kouravas turned a deaf ear to them. In Hamlet, Shakespeare writes: "There is nothing bad or good: only thinking makes it so".

Jesus Christ asked people to speak a language of peace and Lady Macbeth made Macbeth commit a heinous crime of assassinating the king Duncan by way of instigation and poisonous language: a language of vaulting ambition, hatred, conspiracy, violence and doom. Do we not know what language the dictators spoke and what impact it had on the life of the innocent masses? George Bush is a big example of how a violent, disgusting and threatening language can create an atmosphere of disharmony, hatred and disequilibrium in the world.

### **(12) The Language of Education**

The newly born infants respond appropriately to the 'motherese' (the language used by the mother with the infants) which is rhythmic, soft, peaceful and pleasant. Children love poetry, songs and lyrics as they arouse positive feelings in them and moreover these things appeal to them emotionally. Prose is largely heavily cognitive and thus knowledge and information laden while poetry is light and thus emotions and feelings laden. Faced with a cognitive conflict in an argument, people generally resort to poetry and recite a stanza or a couplet to prove their point of view which settles the 'dispute' then and there. And what is remarkable is the fact that everybody falls in line. There is no obstinate clash of ego. The language of peace must always be the language of poetry. Prose is confrontational by nature. Poetry is affective in nature. Therefore, it promotes cooperation, love and peace. One of the most effective ways through which peace can be brought about in the world is meaningful and peaceful education. But the language of education has to be a language of peace. It should be one which is essentially made of peace, made for the growth and made from the development of humanity at large. It should be the language of coexistence, tolerance, love, compassion, public welfare, freedom, equality, fraternity, moral values and secular values. And on the top of it, it should be the language of hope, aspirations, dreams and paradise.

### **(13) Role of Teacher Education (TE) for Peace**

Teacher Education (TE) has a major role to play for social cohesion, harmony and peace. TE should construct its vision and mission based on the core, cardinal, vital principle of peace in the world. Peaceful teacher educators can prepare peaceful teachers who, in turn, will sow the seeds of peace in the young minds during their formative years in schools. The language of teacher education should be the language of peace. Both the content and the methodology of education at all levels should be peace which is the only panacea for all ills of the present world. Teacher education should also design programmes which act as a means of catharsis for students. TE should stop commercialization of TE. How can TE talk of peace when it itself is involved /indulged in maladministration, mismanagement, corruption, exploitation, illegal and immoral practices in our country? The physician will have to heal himself/herself first. TE will have to put its house in order before it starts working for the cause of education. Teacher Education, inter alia, should be interdisciplinary and holistic for creating greater space, time and context for diversity and pluralism. I hope this will put an end to the poetic justice and quietism in TE. Laissez-faire in Teacher Education is unjustifiable.

Does this proposition have no right to get kind attention of the right thinking and peace -loving people in the world?

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