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PHILOSOPHY OF PACIFISM

INTRODUCTION

Several social movements have sprung up to castigate and campaign against the culture of violence and war. The civil and social movements started from ancient Greece, China, India and medieval Europe to the modern civil rights and abolitionist movements in the United States. Anti-violence campaign has become anti war principle and pacifist ideology. The pacifist campaign has nonetheless formed the basis for the strong moral philosophy that discourages every act or action that may involve the application of violence and force. In this unit, we are going to beam our search-light on pacifism and its relevance in promoting peace and security through its anti-violence agenda.

Defining Pacifism

Pacifism can be described as any peaceable act, which prohibits the use of violence and force in the resolution of conflict that may arise in the social interaction that forms the basis of human relations. Pacifism is a moral philosophy that discourages military ideals and aggression. Pacifists believe that every conflict between state and non-state actors should always be resolved through peaceful approaches rather than the use of force and violence, knowing fully well that violence can only bring about more violence. If violence is going to bring peace at all, such peace will always be a negative form, which is likely to generate another bloody conflict of different dimension, scale and intensity.

Pacifist also hold that international war should always be resolved by diplomatic and judicial means to forestall (continued)? butchery of innocent souls and destruction of property. Pacifism is not limited to just war, but can also include opposing the application of any form of violence in the resolution of conflict. The use of dove symbol is associated with pacifism. Dove symbolizes the hope of salvation and peace. The pacifists have persistently maintained that war or violence is negative as it has failed to address human problems, and there is need to do everything to prevent violent situation. But it is important to note here that it is not every aspect of pacifism that rejects violence in its totality, which brings us to the question of which violent action is just or unjust. Some pacifists oppose war but not the use of force against individuals.

They only oppose military institutions of the modern state. These sets of pacifists are known as **anti-militarists**.

Origin of Pacifism

Pacifism can be said, to have begun since the pre-historic era where the early people took cognizance of the need to prevent total war and reduce the terrible impact of war on man and his environment. Utmost passion and respect for human life and general ecosystem formed the centerpiece of Jainism, a pacifist movement founded by Mahavira (599-527 BC). This pacifist ideology accords a great premium on the inestimable value of human life as well as the sanctity of human blood. No matter the crime committed by a man, it is extremely irrational to harm or kill him.

The ancient Greece also opposed any form of violence among individuals but its pacifist philosophy did not include any opposition to inter-state aggression. Jesus Christ of Nazareth also promoted advocacy of pacifism. He called on all men to be peaceful and to always conduct themselves in a way devoid of violence. He also opposed violence in its entirety, saying that no excuse could be given for violence. He, therefore, maintained that if a man slaps you on a cheek, you should turn the other. Prior to the reign of Constantine, the early church upheld the principle of pacifism as preached by Jesus (Weidhorn, 2004: 13-18). During the reign of the Roman Emperor, Constantine I, the church began to venture into politics as many Christian leaders and the faithful got entangled with the mundane political power and authority.

Consequently, the principle of pacifism became less fashionable among the Christians, leading to the eventual prominence of just war in the Christendom. The use of violence to fight against evil and injustice was a just war. Waging a war against the enemies or perceived enemies of Christendom could be regarded as a just war. Apart from Constantine, St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas also threw their weight behind the repudiation of Christ version of pacifism where they argued that there is justification if one takes to violence (as a last resort) to protect his rights and seek for justice.

In the modern history, Peace Churches, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Amish, Mennonites and Church of the Brethren have played prominent roles in their pacifist struggle and anti-war campaign. The Quakers was very popular in the US, in its campaign against violence

and militarism. There was strong anti-war sentiment in the West during the 19th century. Many socialist groups and movements in that century were antimilitarists who condemned war by its nature. War was a kind of institutional coercion facilitated by political leadership, imposed on the working class, who were mandated to fight and die in wars. And the war provided no benefit to the working class. Those who benefitted from the war(s) were the bourgeoisie who never experienced the agonies and pains of the battlefields.

The assassination of a French socialist leader, Jean Jaure on 31 July 1914 further propelled international campaign against militarism and jingoistic attitude of political leaders. Peace societies like Peace Pledge Union, the War Register's League, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom sprang up during this period. The writings of Dutch philosophers and jurists, Desiderius Erasmus and Hugo Grotius in the 15th and 16th centuries also promoted pacifist ideology and the need to resolve conflict through peaceful methods.

Their works gave prominence to the importance of international law in the peaceful resolution of conflict. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, an Hindu nationalist leader through his exemplary political and spiritual leadership also contributed immensely to pacifism. His (peaceable) activities were instrumental to the eventual political independence of India. He was the initiator of *Satyagraha*, a form of mass civil disobedience and agitation against colonial tyranny. The ideology was built around *Ahimsa*, a philosophy of non-violence and pacifism.

The aftermath of World War I experienced an increase in the pacifist literature and movements. Many of these literature or writings were banned in several European states, notable among them were fascist Italy under the draconian leadership of Benitto Mussolini, the nazist Germany among others. Pacifism was then mistaken for cowardice by several militarist elements in Europe at that time. The eruption of the Second World War gave a new meaning to pacifism as many of the committed pacifists supported the counter-aggression of the Allied forces and Germany and its Axis forces. Bertrand Russell also supported the arms struggle against the nazist Germany, claiming that the war policy of the allied forces was a welcome idea, which helped Europe and entire world to check the excesses of Hitler Germany and its fascist allies. This position was what Russell referred to as *relative pacifism*. During the same period, Dorothy Day and Ammon Hennacy of the Catholic Worker Movement called on the young Americans not to consider being

enlisted in the military service. In the wake of the cold war and the attendant nuclear proliferation and armament, more pacifist movements sprang up and some of these groups include Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the United Kingdom among others. Another notable pacifist was Martin Luther King Jr (1929-1968), the leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. He really provided exemplary leadership in his campaign against militarism and violence.

We will look at two important Types of Pacifism

Self-Contradictory Doctrine

Several scholars including Jan Narveson maintain that pacifism is a self-contradictory doctrine. According to Narveson everyone has rights and responsibilities not to violate other people's rights. In as much as pacifists agree to not defend themselves, aggressors may take advantage of the situation, by infringing the rights of these pacifists. The attitude of the pacifists often obliterates the responsibility flow in the relation among men, such that an aggressor will continue to thrive in his dastardly act as he pays no penalty for offensive behaviour. Therefore, the unchecked excesses of the aggressor may likely lead to further aggression, which will result in the abuse of rights.

Narveson (1965:259-271), affirms that: the prevention of infractions of that right is precisely what one has a right to when one has a right at all. Narveson then concludes that it is not immoral to use violence or any other means to protect one's rights, and engaging an aggressor in violence is not irresponsible. It does not also paint one as unpacifist person in as much that violence adopted by one is for self-defense.

Ethical Contradictions of Pacifism

Many scholars and commentators have crucified pacifists for pretending to be in total opposition to the use of violence while many of them have at one time or the other resorted to violence. No one can work against his nature. God has created man to have human instinct-fight for survival. Some men by their nature will always try to outsmart the other, and in trying to do so, violence may be employed as the most viable vehicle to meet the inordinate needs. It will be quite unnatural for the other man or men not to react swiftly against such irrational and aggressive behaviour to forestall being used as preys. It is funny that many of these pacifists preaching

absolute justification to oppose violence and war, often resort to violence when they are pushed to the wall.

CONCLUSION

Pacifism can be both passive and active. It is **passive** in the sense that a person can refuse to fight while **active** when a person is working for peace. Several pacifists are recognized as conscientious objectors basically, by their refusal to take part in any official violence. These people oppose aggression and their profession may mandate them to be part of military operation but they may refuse to take part and opt for non-violent operations. Some governments recognize these people (for their non-violent philosophy), while other governments may regard them as traitors or unpatriotic elements or cowards. Pacifism has continued to play a major role in the campaign against arms proliferation, armament and militarism. The activities of the pacifist movements cover every continent, seeking for global peace and security as development of culture of non-violence.

REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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