

## **THE PROBLEM OF COEXISTENCE**

**Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

Someone has said it and I have heard more than once my one-time spiritual guru (guide) speaking that, “Man has learned to fly like birds in heaven and swim like fish in the sea but man has not learned to live in peace and harmony with his neighbour!”

Man needs essentially two qualities to live in peace and harmony with his neighbour: fearlessness and tolerance. There is no peace where one man is afraid of another or where one is intolerant of the other. Wherever there are fear and intolerance, there are no freedom, no love, no unity, no bonhomie and no healthy relationship between persons.

A story of a Chinese emperor can help us to illustrate my point of view. This is a story of olden times when kings and emperors ruled the world. In those days there was a custom in China that the emperors got historians to write every day history and keep it sealed for the next generation. There was a committee of 12 historians including a few top officials of the palace to write the history. They met every day, discussed the events of the day and wrote the history. Then they kept the history in a sealed box. The custom in China then was to break the seal of history box and read the history only for the benefit of the new emperor. This way the new emperor could learn from the past history and govern his country better.

Then, a cruel emperor came to the throne. He was very curious to know what the historians wrote about the history of the previous day for the next generation. So against the custom the emperor ordered that the sealed history box be opened and the history of the previous day be read to him. According to the emperor’s order a minister broke the seal of the history box and read the history. The emperor was so furious with the written history of the previous day that he called the head of the history committee and beheaded him!

On the next day of the beheading event the emperor again insisted that the history of the previous day be read to him. The emperor was furious again because the historians had noted the cruel act of the emperor of beheading the head of the history committee and that the historians have denounced the event. Again the emperor was so furious that he ordered the new head of the history committee to be hanged. On the third day too the new head of the history committee was beheaded for writing the true history. Then came the turn of the fourth head of the history committee. He reached the palace with a salve carrying a coffin box.

“You can see, your Excellency, that I am not afraid of death. So I offer you my head and this coffin box. But you cannot always hide the truth under any cover. Words will always be alive judging you as a criminal. I choose to die than live under an autocratic and cruel Emperor who kills people for upholding the truth.”

It is said about that Emperor that he was very much impressed by the words of that truthful historian. The Emperor not only let him go ‘unpunished’ but he also strived ever after to mend his ways without bothering to read the written history of his time.

The story of the intolerant Emperor and the fearless historian tells us many things. In this context, if we examine the recent history of Gujarat, we can learn a lot about many things of autocratic men and fearless individuals. To my knowledge no Gujarati historian has written the recent real history of Gujarat for the fear of loosing his/her head. But thanks of fearless journalists and writers in English the read recent history of Gujarat is available in that language.

I do not intend to enter into a discussion of history of Gujarat. I am neither a historian nor an expert in history. Then, I do not also want to divert into history, as the purpose of this article is not about writing the history.

But there is no doubt that the recent history of Gujarat has created a lot of discussion and differences of opinions. For instance, an article by Prof. Ganesh Devi created a lot of heated arguments in social circles and in the media. Without going into the merits and demerits of such a controversy here I would like to discuss a few basic principles which I believe.

First, I believe that every person has a right to co-existence. People have right to live in peace and harmony. This is the principle of live and let others live. But the naked truth is that we are not able to live in peace with the other person, with our neighbour even though we are in the world of instant communication through internet, computer, web sites and other means of modern technology. We believe or rather our actions proclaim that we exploit and put others down instead of acknowledging and welcoming the existence of the others. Theoretically we accept the principle of co-existence but in real life-situation we are intolerant of the existence of the others.

Second, I believe that every man and woman has the right to self-respect and dignity. Every person deserves my love and respect irrespective of his/her caste, creed, language, culture and social status. Even my enemies or detractors as persons deserve my respect and love.

Dr. Ganesh Devi wrote about Gujarat's hatred of Muslims. Many writers and journalists wrote supporting or opposing his writing and they created a big controversy. In the controversial writings it is interesting to study how many wrote with respect for the person of Dr. Ganesh Devi while supporting or opposing his point of view or the truth as seen by the professor who is also a well known social worker. If some one has done wrong, we need to have the courage and fearlessness to say that a wrong has been committed. But it is not fair to insult a person on account of the wrong he/she may or may not have done. If we do so, then it is an expression of our ego and selfishness. It is not humane to do so.

Third, I believe in the freedom of expression. Our secular constitution has given us the right of freedom of expression. Every person has the right to express himself/herself on anything and everything like politics, religions and caste, etc. Everyone has the full right of self-expression without violating the freedom of other people. But do we really accept the freedom of expression of other people when such expressions are not to our liking or in tune with our beliefs?

Fourth, I consider writing a noble profession or a great service to humanity. I would like to ask a question in the context of the controversy created by the Dr. Ganesh Devi's writing. Did the writers do justice to the noble profession when they supported or opposed him? Did the writers

only express their raised feelings and charged emotions? Or Did the writers keep their true perspective in expressing without fear or favour what they opined as true and relevant with statements and supporting facts and arguments? Did the writers give vent to their prejudices and ignorances or did they really study all the concerned facts and gave their considered opinion?

Fifth, I fully agree with Mahatma Gandhi in his opinion that in our thinking and acting and especially in making important decisions we should examine how the decision affects the poor man or woman living in remote villages. The recent history of Gujarat proclaims that here no-one cares for such poor men and women. But it is always such poor people who have to suffer the most when there are natural and man-made calamities.

The recent history of Gujarat proclaims to the whole world that we – the 5 crore people of Gujarat – have got very many achievements. But we have not learnt the lesson how can the minority and majority communities live together. The idea of a world family has not sung deep into us beyond our lip service!.

In this situation when we raise the question of our co-existence and our self-identity, I am reminded of the inspiring words of Carl Gustav Jung. Carl Jung writes in Memories, Dreams, Reflections, “As far as we can discern, the purpose of human existence is to light a candle in the darkness of our existence.(contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))

#

(Last Changed : 01-08-2008)

(Next Change : 16-08-2008)

Fr. Varghese Paul ã Copyright 2008