

# 21st Century – Nuclear war or Gandhism?

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The 20th century has witnessed two things: Gandhi's non-violence and nuclear weapons. Which one will the 21st century choose and why?

I believe that the 21st century will choose Gandhi's non-violence. I would like to explain the reasons.

Man is essentially a sane entity who is capable of understanding what is necessary for him. There has been enough of senseless violence in the past few decades. Any sensible human being—and the majority of human beings are sensible—would deplore such chaos. The world cannot continue to wage war like physical giants and seek peace like intellectual pigmies. Man, as represented by my generation has realised that such a situation can only lead to a state of absolute anarchy. The clatter of arms can no longer drown the sound of peace, non-violence and law.

What we need at this juncture, to maintain human civilisation, is peace and

this peace can be attained only through non-violence, not nuclear deterrence. The most barbaric, retrograde action which man has done in the course of civilisation was the atomisation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which caused untold misery and loss of life. Such a mistake cannot, indeed must not, be allowed to happen again with nuclear weapons. For the consequences of such a catastrophe would be the very extinction of the human species. I do not agree with Einstein when he said, "I cannot believe that civilisation will be wiped out in a war fought with atomic bombs." This is because he was contemplating an atomic and not a nuclear war, the consequences of which are infinitely more extensive and horrifying.

"Civilisation" as Toynbee said, "is a movement, not a condition; a voyage and not a harbour." It is a pity that one of the movements formed with the purpose of fostering peace for the sake of mankind by our forefathers, the U.N.O., has so far

failed to prevent the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Such a build up is bound to cause a nuclear holocaust some day. We came close to it in the early 60's during the Cuban missile crisis, when, thanks to the strong position adopted by the then U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, the threat was defused. Civilisation, being at the crossroads, cannot afford another such insane game of charades. If the monetary and human resources spent on making and maintaining nuclear weapons is spent for the welfare of the poor and needy sections of society, the world would be a better place to live in.

I am not against the maintenance of conventional weapons and armies as these are necessary for policing our borders and maintaining law and order. But even this must be within certain limits. An international organisation must be created with powers to punish any errant nation. It must have greater effectiveness than the U.N.O. or the League of Nations. Such an organisation is necessary considering the number of nuclear or seminuclear countries like U.S.A., U.S.S.R., India, Brazil, France, Israel, South Africa and Pakistan to name a few. Treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty have no value and enforcibility. "It is indeed a pity", as Omar Bradley put it, "that we have grasped the mystery of the

atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount". It is my opinion that the most disadvantageous peace is, by far, preferable to the most just and necessary war.

Since the time of Christ, non-violence has exercised a beneficial influence, albeit limited, on human society. The influence of Gandhiji on Indian History cannot be gauged from the facts as we know them. His absence would have prolonged the British domination over India for a number of years. The principle of 'Ahimsa', as he propounded was so beautiful and so moving, conceptually, that it evoked the lost spirit of nationalism and patriotism in the Indian psyche. What couldn't be achieved by 300 years of armed struggle, namely Independence, was achieved by 30 years of peaceful resistance. The world needs more such charismatic persons and it is for my generation to take up this challenge. Society needs peace in order to maintain the cherished ideals of honesty, fairplay and justice.

What is necessary is all pervading universal love in the hearts of the human brotherhood and this can be achieved only by non-violence and not nuclear war. Violence, either physical or mental is an abhorrent concept which must be discarded by civilisation. Nuclear deterrence, at best creates only an uneasy peace and an un-

healthy situation wherein the fate of millions rests in the hands of a few – the few who have their fingers ready on the nuclear buttons, to press them and cause Armageddon. How far can we trust these people? After all, as is said, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. Will not such unlimited power cause them to become megalomaniacs? Such a situation must not be allowed to exist. This is common knowledge, but the question is – How can we change the situation? And the answer is – NON-VIOLENCE. The successes of non-violence may be few, but they are all the more effective for that. Contrast the Indian freedom movement and the late Martin Luther King Jr.’s peaceful struggle for Negro rights with the Russian revolution or the so called “Cultural revolution” of the Chinese which have caused despotic, tyrannical regimes in both the countries.

It is all the better, that the consequences of a nuclear war are so terrifying – or else

we would grow too fond of it. Nuclear warfare cannot be prevented by ineffective meaningless methods such as SALT or the pleas of Six Nation Agreement. What is required is a consensus *ad idem* between all the peoples of the world to ensure a radical destruction of all nuclear warheads so that man can breathe easily and not out of fear.

Modern man will adopt only non-violence, not because he is a coward but because he is an integral part of civilisation and civilisation does not lie in a greater or lesser degree of refinement and sophistication but in a greater degree of awareness shared by the entire human race. The experiences of man over the centuries regarding the perils of warfare and the necessity of peace vindicated the resurgence of antinuclear sentiment all over the world. There are, of course, a few insane men who insist on the preservation of nuclear weapons and succeed because of their power, but they are bound to be overwhelmed by the peaceful many.

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*It is too late to look for instruments when  
the work calls for execution.*

— SAMUEL JOHNSON