UNIT 2 TOLERANCE, HARMONY AND FORGIVENESS

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

The modern world is characterised by diversity and escalating intolerance. Strife potentially menaces in every region. It is not confined to any country, but is a global threat. In Wikipedia, it is mentioned that alarmed by the current rise in acts of intolerance, violence, terrorism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism, racism, marginalisation and discrimination directed against national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, refugees, migrant workers, immigrants and vulnerable groups within societies, as well as acts of violence and intimidation committed against individuals exercising their freedom of opinion and expression - all of which threaten the consolidation of peace, harmony and democracy, both nationally and internationally, and are obstacles to development, the emphasis on tolerance and harmony is more essential than ever before.

The holistic understanding of man's spiritual quest led Gandhi to adopt and preach a theory of tolerance, harmony, forgiveness and mutual respect founded on truth and maintenance of non-violence. Gandhi was also pained by the caste-based social structure that India has consistently followed from time immemorial, and particularly the curse of untouchability, which to Gandhi was the greatest sin of all; because it not only spelt discrimination but debased a particular section of mankind on an occupational basis. He felt the Indian society as weakened at its very core and embarked in a fight against it with his heart and soul.

Aims and Objectives

This Unit would enable you to understand

- The concepts of tolerance, harmony and forgiveness
- The measures to counter intolerance
- The maintenance of tolerance and harmony at community and international levels.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING TOLERANCE AND HARMONY

Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, but also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace. Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States.

Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism, democracy, harmony and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments. Consistent with respect for human rights, the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. It means that one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others.

2.2.1 Importance of Tolerance and Harmony

Tolerance is integral to different groups relating to one another in a respectful and understanding way. In cases where communities have been deeply entrenched in violent conflict, being tolerant helps the affected groups endure the pain of the past and resolve their differences. In situations where conditions are economically depressed and politically charged, groups and individuals may find it hard to tolerate those that are different from them or have caused them harm. In such cases, discrimination, dehumanisation, repression, and violence may occur.

2.2.2 Seeds of Intolerance

In the absence of their own experiences, individuals base their impressions and opinions of one another on assumptions. These assumptions can be influenced by the positive or negative beliefs of those who are either closest or most influential in their lives, including parents or other family members, colleagues, educators, and/or role models. In education, there exists school curriculum and educational literature that provides biased and/or negative historical accounts of world cultures. Education or schooling based on myths can demonise and dehumanise other cultures rather than promote cultural understanding and a tolerance for diversity and differences.

2.2.3 Dealing with Intolerance

To encourage tolerance, parties to a conflict and third parties must remind themselves and others that tolerating tolerance is preferable to tolerating intolerance. There is evidence that casual inter-group contact does not necessarily reduce inter-group tensions, and may in fact exacerbate existing animosities. However, through intimate inter-group contact, groups will base their opinions of one another on personal experiences, which can reduce prejudices. Conflict transformation NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and other actors in the field of peacebuilding can offer mechanisms such as trainings to help parties to a conflict communicate with one another.

Individuals should continually focus on being tolerant of others in their daily lives. This involves consciously challenging the stereotypes and assumptions that they typically encounter in making decisions about others and/or working with others either in a social or a professional environment. To enhance communication between both sides, dialogue mechanisms such as dialogue groups or problem-solving workshops provide opportunities for both sides to express their needs and interests. In such cases, actors engaged in the workshops or similar forums feel that their concerns have been heard and recognised. Restorative justice programmes such as victim-offender mediation provide this kind of opportunity. For instance, through victim-offender mediation, victims can ask for an apology from the offender. The media should use positive images to promote understanding and cultural sensitivity. The more groups and individuals are exposed to positive media messages about other cultures, the less they are likely to find faults with one another-particularly those communities who have little access to the outside world and are susceptible to what the media tells them.

2.2.4 Tolerance and Harmony at State Level

Gandhi believed that a precondition for tolerance and harmony at the state level requires just and impartial legislation, law enforcement and judicial and administrative process. It also requires that economic and social opportunities be made available to each person without any discrimination. Exclusion and marginalisation can lead to frustration, hostility and fanaticism. In order to achieve a more tolerant society, States should ratify existing international human rights conventions, and draft new legislations where necessary to ensure equality of treatment and of opportunity for all groups and individuals in society. It is essential for international harmony that individuals, communities and nations accept and respect the multicultural character of the human family. Without tolerance there can be no peace, and without peace there can be no development or democracy. Intolerance may take the form of marginalisation of vulnerable groups and their exclusion from social and political participation, as well as violence and discrimination against them. Gandhi emphasised the responsibilities of states to develop and encourage respect for human

rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, gender, language, national origin, religion or disability, and to combat intolerance. Gandhi resolved to take all positive measures necessary to promote tolerance in our societies, because tolerance is not only a cherished principle, but also a necessity for peace and for the economic and social advancement of all in society.

2.3 COMMUNITY AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Gandhi believed that tolerance is necessary for harmony between individuals. Tolerance promotion and the shaping of attitudes of openness, mutual listening and solidarity should take place in schools and universities and through non-formal education, at home and in the workplace. The communication media are in a position to play a constructive role in facilitating free and open dialogue and discussion, disseminating the values of tolerance, and highlighting the dangers of indifference towards the rise in intolerant groups and ideologies. Gandhi emphasised that particular attention should be paid to vulnerable groups which are socially or economically disadvantaged so as to afford them the protection of the laws and social measures in force, in particular with regard to housing, employment and health, to respect the authenticity of their culture and values, and to facilitate their social and occupational advancement and integration, especially through education. Appropriate scientific studies and networking should be undertaken to co-ordinate the response to this global challenge, including analysis by the social sciences of root causes and effective countermeasures, as well as research and monitoring in support of policy-making and standard-setting action by Member States.

2.3.1 Role of Education in making Harmonious Society

Gandhi emphasised that education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. The first step in tolerance education is to teach people what their shared rights and freedoms are, so that they may be respected, and to promote the will to protect those of others. Education for tolerance should be considered an urgent imperative; that is why it is necessary to promote systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance - major roots of violence and exclusion. Education policies and programmes should contribute to development of understanding, solidarity and tolerance among individuals as well as among ethnic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic groups and nations. Education for tolerance should aim at countering influences that lead to fear and exclusion of others, and should help young people to develop capacities for independent judgement, critical thinking and ethical reasoning. People must support and implement programmes of social science research and education for tolerance, human rights and non-violence. This means devoting special attention to improving teacher training, curricula, the content of textbooks and lessons, and other educational materials including new educational technologies, with a view to educating caring and responsible citizens open to other cultures, to appreciate the value of freedom, respectful of human dignity and differences, and to prevent conflicts or resolve them by non-violent means.

2.3.2 Foundation of Democracy

Gandhi believed that tolerance is not just agreeing with one another or remaining indifferent in the face of injustice, but rather showing respect for the essential humanity in every person. Intolerance is the failure to appreciate and respect the practices, opinions and beliefs of another group. For instance, there is a high degree of intolerance between

Israeli Jews and Palestinians who are at odds over issues of identity, security, self-determination, statehood, the right of return for refugees, the status of Jerusalem and many other issues. The result is continuing inter-group violence. Tolerance is also the foundation of democracy and human rights. Intolerance in multi-ethnic, multi-religious or multicultural societies leads to violations of human rights, violence or armed conflict. Tolerance is neither indulgence nor indifference. It is respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance recognises the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. Education for tolerance should aim at countering influences that lead to fear and exclusion of others, and should help young people develop capacities for independent judgement, critical thinking and ethical reasoning. The diversity of our world's many religions, languages, cultures and ethnicities is not a pretext for conflict, but is a treasure that enriches us all.

2.3.3 Moral Virtue

People are naturally diverse; only tolerance can ensure the survival of mixed communities in every region of the globe. The appreciation of diversity, the ability to live and let others live, the ability to adhere to one's convictions while accepting that others adhere to their's, the ability to enjoy one's rights and freedoms without infringing on those of others', tolerance has always been considered a moral virtue. People must commit themselves to promoting tolerance and non-violence through programmes and institutions in the fields of education, science, culture and communication along with outright injustice and violence, discrimination and marginalisation.

2.3.4 Religious Tolerance

Gandhi read the scriptures and doctrines of all major world religions with great interest and finally arrived at a conclusion that they are all 'more or less' the same. The phrase 'more or less' was a term he systematically used because he thought that no religion could grasp God in its entirety. He put great stress on prayer, non-violence and celibacy as ways of spiritual enlightenment and believed that salvation was the ultimate goal of life. Gandhi's secular theories took on a special significance in the particular context of the Indian national movement. The Indian society has been traditionally plagued by the evils of caste and creed-based discrimination. The caste-oriented stratification of the Indian society has hindered all chances of national unification from the early days of Indian society. The situation was complicated by the presence of various religious groups within the country, who were not ready to compromise any ground to reach a platform of commonality. Gandhi preached tolerance of all religions. To him, his religion was love and tolerance, his God were his principles to which he adhered no matter how great the adversity was, and he was a fighter – one who fought with truth and non-violence. He believed violence could get you victory but it would only be momentary. Instead, he believed in conquering the enemy with love.

Gandhi upheld tolerance and had a lasting faith in non-violent co-existence of all religious schools. Gandhi was critical of the term 'tolerance' as he thought it was patronising, as if the one who uses it has a firm belief in the superiority of his own faith and was magnanimous enough to allow other faiths to exist under his confirmed superiority. This to Gandhi was an error. His particular brand of secularism was based on mutual respect. He believed they were 'branches of the same majestic tree'. Gandhi believed all religions ultimately described only attributes of God but never His being. It was the fault of the limitation of human understanding and imagination, and not of any particular faith.

Secularism for Gandhi was an absolute necessity to bring about any form of constructive and all-encompassing political movement. Gandhi preached his ideals of secularism and religious tolerance across the length and breadth of the country. He showed his consolidation to the Muslim leaders through the support that Congress extended to the Khilafat movement. Gandhi wrote extensively on the need of secularism in India, and made speeches to the same effect all over the country. Tolerance is extended to policies, conditions, and modes of behaviour which should not be tolerated because they are impeding, if not destroying, the chances of creating an existence without fear and misery. The political locus of tolerance has changed: while it is more or less quietly and constitutionally withdrawn from the opposition, it is made compulsory behaviour with respect to established policies. Tolerance is turned from an active into a passive state, from practice to non-practice: laissez-faire the constituted authorities. It is the people who tolerate the government, which in turn tolerates opposition within the framework determined by the constituted authorities.

2.4 UNTOUCHABILITY: AN OBSTACLE IN HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

Mahatma Gandhi highly grieved about the caste system that characterised the Indian society. But it was untouchability that particularly pained him. All his life, he worked hard for eradicating this heinous practice from its very roots. He drew sharp distinction between caste and varna. Varna was based on profession. And in present day India, wrote Gandhi, there is no other trace of varnashram, as they are easily interchangeable, and are actually interchanged at times, except for the varna of the Shudra. Their plight continued uninterrupted from the ancient times. Gandhi thought caste system to be a social evil, but untouchability was a sin. All his life, Gandhi worked for the untouchables. In fact, in one of his letters, Gandhi elevated the bhangis, or the night-soil cleaners as the very epitome of service for God, as they do their unclean work and cleanse society of its perils, and receive nothing but shame and admonition for it. Every man, thought Gandhi, should find a lesson in it. They should dispense their services to society and expect no reward in return. That would be the greatest service to God.

2.5 LIMITATION OF TOLERANCE

The function and value of tolerance depend on the equality prevalent in the society in which tolerance is practised. Tolerance itself stands subject to overriding criteria: its range and its limits cannot be defined in terms of the respective society. In other words, tolerance is an end in itself only when it is truly universal, practised by the rulers as well as by the ruled, by the lords as well as by the peasants, by the sheriffs as well as by their victims. Universal tolerance is possible only when no real or alleged enemy requires in the national interest the education and training of people in military violence and destruction. Limitations of tolerance are normally prior to the explicit and judicial limitations as defined by the courts, customs, governments, etc. Within the framework of such a social structure, tolerance can be safely practised and proclaimed.

The tolerance which enlarged the range and content of freedom was always partisan-intolerant toward the protagonists of the repressive status quo. The issue was only the degree and extent of intolerance. Tolerance of free speech is the way of improvement, of progress in liberation, not because there is no objective truth, and improvement must necessarily be a compromise between a variety of opinions, but because there is an

objective truth which can be discovered and ascertained only in learning and comprehending that which is and that which can be and ought to be done for the sake of improving the lot of mankind.

Universal toleration becomes questionable when its rationale no longer prevails, when tolerance is administered to manipulated and indoctrinated individuals who parrot, as their own, the opinion of their masters, for whom heteronomy has become autonomy. Impartiality to the utmost, equal treatment of competing and conflicting issues is indeed a basic requirement for decision-making in the democratic process- it is an equally basic requirement for defining the limits of tolerance. The real possibilities of human freedom are relative to the attained stage of civilisation. They depend on the material and intellectual resources available at the respective stage, and they are quantifiable and calculable to a high degree. So are, at the stage of advanced industrial society, the most rational ways of using these resources and distributing the social product with priority on the satisfaction of vital needs and with a minimum of toil and injustice.

2.6 INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR TOLERANCE

The United Nations Charter states: 'We, the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, ... and for these ends to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours'. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion' (Article 18), 'of opinion and expression' (Article 19), and that education 'should promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups' (Article 26). In order to generate public awareness, emphasise the dangers of intolerance and react with renewed commitment and action in support of tolerance promotion and education, UNESCO proclaimed 16th November as the annual International Day for Tolerance.

International organisations need to find ways to enshrine the principles of tolerance in policy. For instance, the United Nations has already created 'The Declaration of Moral Principles on Tolerance', adopted and signed in Paris by UNESCO's 185 member states on November 16, 1995, which qualifies tolerance as a moral, political, and legal requirement for individuals, groups and states. The International Year for Tolerance, for the first time, enunciated a personal virtue that is increasingly viewed as a political and legal requirement for peaceful co-existence. Governments also should aim to institutionalise the policies of tolerance. For example, in South Africa, the Education Ministry has advocated the integration of a public school tolerance curriculum into the classroom; the curriculum promotes a holistic approach to learning. The United States government has recognised one week a year as international education week, encouraging schools, organisations, institutions and individuals to engage in projects and exchanges to heighten global awareness of cultural differences.

2.7 COUNTERING INTOLERANCE

2.7.1 Law and Education

Gandhi believed that each government is responsible for enforcing human rights laws, for banning and punishing hate crimes and discrimination against minorities, whether these are committed by State officials, private organisations or individuals. The State must also

ensure equal access to courts, human rights commissioners or ombudsmen, so that people do not take justice into their own hands and resort to violence to settle their disputes. Laws are necessary but not sufficient for countering intolerance in individual attitudes. Intolerance is very often rooted in ignorance and fear: fear of the unknown, of the other, other cultures, nations and religions. Intolerance is also closely linked to an exaggerated sense of self-worth and pride, whether personal, national or religious. These notions are taught and learned at an early age. Therefore, greater emphasis needs to be placed on educating more and better. Greater efforts need to be made to teach children about tolerance and human rights, about other ways of life. Children should be encouraged at home and in school to be open-minded and curious. Education is a life-long experience and does not begin or end in school. Endeavours to build tolerance through education will not succeed unless they reach all age groups, and take place everywhere: at home, in schools, in the workplace, in law-enforcement and legal training, and not least in entertainment and on the information highways.

2.7.2 Access to Information

Gandhi said that intolerance is most dangerous when it is exploited to fulfil the political and territorial ambitions of an individual or groups of individuals. Hatemongers often begin by identifying the public's tolerance threshold. They then develop fallacious arguments, lie with statistics and manipulate public opinion with misinformation and prejudice. The most efficient way to limit the influence of hatemongers is to develop policies that generate and promote freedom and pluralism of the press, in order to allow the public to differentiate between facts and opinions.

2.7.3 Individual Awareness

Gandhi realised that intolerance in a society is the sum-total of the intolerance of its individual members. Bigotry, stereotyping, stigmatising, insults and racial jokes are examples of individual expressions of intolerance to which some people are subjected daily. Intolerance breeds intolerance. It leaves its victims in pursuit of revenge. In order to fight intolerance individuals should become aware of the link between their behaviour and the vicious cycle of mistrust and violence in society.

2.7.4 Local Solutions

Gandhi hoped that the realisation of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed. In other words, today tolerance appears again as what it was in its origins, at the beginning of the modern period- a partisan goal, a subversive liberating notion and practice. Conversely, what is proclaimed and practised as tolerance today, is in many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression.

2.8 FORGIVENESS AS AN ACT OF NON-VIOLENCE

Gandhi stated that if everyone took an eye for an eye with respect to revenge, the world would be blind. On forgiveness, Gandhi understood that forgiveness is a quality that enhances the forgiver, one that takes courage and strength to achieve. For forgiveness is giving up the right to harm others who have harmed you. The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong, because it is human nature to want to strike back when hurt. However, when one strikes back against those who hurt, one undermines

the self and becomes the same kind of individual as those who hurt. When someone hurts us or someone we care about, it is a quite natural human tendency to seek vengeance. Gandhi refused to prosecute the assailants on the ground of forgiving the enemy. Such forgiveness is a true spirit of nonviolence. Gandhi deeply felt that the act of being forgiven is equally important to the act of forgiving. Gandhi believed that forgiveness was the best weapon to be used against the wrong doers so that a change of heart in the opponent could be achieved. He believed that change of heart in the opponent is the real victory. Forgiveness is choosing to love. It is the first skill of self-giving love. Forgiveness grants pardon without harbouring resentment. Forgiveness is giving a person another chance. Truth in action is ahimsa and love. Truth and love, Satya and ahimsa are like the two sides of a coin. All great religions enjoin the practice of love. It continues: "Non-violence is complete innocence. Complete non-violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives. Non-violence is innocence in its action form, good will towards all life. It is pure love…. hatred deflects our thinking, endangers the very sense of humanity. Love of power takes the place of conscience. Forgiveness is the attribute of strong, he who is weak cannot forgive. 'Forget' and 'Forgive' goes parallel. Mistakes, offences are made by all. People get punished also for their deeds but very few allow such people to let them go and forgive them. It is really difficult to forget and forgive sometimes but if forgotten and forgiven, nothing can be more admiring than that. The tension, the load gets lighten, a grudge can be a heavy weight to bear. Feeling of hatred and ill-will leave a lasting effect on one's mind. Forgiveness is seen as a practice to prevent harmful thoughts from causing havoc on one's mental well-being. One should practice forgiveness as the victim 'seeking pardon' is the most unfortunate of all. Forgiveness is more manly than punishment".

2.9 SUMMARY

The way to harmony is a compilation of Gandhi's reflections on certain problems which divide mankind. Everywhere in the world, individuals and groups are divided because of fear, suspicion and hatred. It depends on local conditions whether the division expresses itself along religious, economic, political, caste or colour lines. Whatever be the form, insecurity is perhaps the major cause of individual and social dissensions. A person who is integrated and sure of himself fears none and consequently provokes no fear. Tolerance is an end in itself. The elimination of violence, and the reduction of suppression to the extent required for protecting man and animals from cruelty and aggression are preconditions for the creation of a humane society. Such a society does not yet exist. It is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. The United Nations has adopted a resolution to observe Mahatma Gandhi's birthday as the International Day of Non-Violence to recognise his life-long aim in spreading the message of peace, harmony and non-violence.

2.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe the role of tolerance in the making of a harmonious society.

2. Do you think that intolerance can be perpetuated?

3. Critically examine the role of education in bringing a more peaceful environment for all.
4. Describe Gandhi's views on forgiveness.
5. Analyse the different solutions put forward by Gandhi to fight intolerance.
6. Examine the statement that forgiveness and tolerance are the pre-requisites for harmony.

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