

Gandhi, Human Security and the Soka Renaissance

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Martin Luther King's assertion in the sixties that it was from Mahatma Gandhi that he learned the operational tactics to concretise Love and the subsequent campaigns he launched for civil liberties overwhelmingly demonstrated the efficacy of the Gandhian approach as an effective alternative. Though in different parts of the world Gandhian methods later continued to inspire freedom fighters and social activists, it was in Nelson Mandela in South Africa the Gandhian strategy found its most successful votary at the political level. While Dr. Mandela's commitment to Gandhian mode of fight was fairly known, there has been another movement, the Soka Gakkai, with its headquarters in Japan which has been adopting Gandhian techniques in its activities on a global level. The Soka Gakkai and its third President Dr. Daisaku Ikeda have invited International attraction as committed promoters of the holistic vision of Gandhi. The Soka Renaissance they have been aiming at and the Gandhian vision of nonviolent global change have much in common and Dr. Ikeda's espousal of the Gandhian strategies brings him on par with Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dr. Nelson Mandela as creative geniuses who in their own way added new layers of meaning to nonviolence by interpreting through concrete action the infinite possibilities of the Gandhian alternative.

Last October [1996], I was lecturing at the University of Alberta in Canada. The lectures were invariably on Gandhi, his contribution to world peace, peace movements in Asia, Europe and America. One session was devoted to movements and institutions propagating peace and I selected Soka Gakkai and its work for discussion. After my presentation it was question and answer session at which I was asked by one young student to tell her what attracted me to the ideals of Soka Gakkai and whether I personally subscribed to their objectives. It was a good question; a difficult one too. To the first part of her question I said to the audience that as a student of Mahatma Gandhi I was drawn to the noble, practical and liberal vision of the Soka Gakkai which over the years has been involved in a tireless and uncompromising crusade for building bridges of understanding among peoples of the world through education and culture without compromising the core of the Buddhist vision of human life which is essentially inward in order to sustain the basic rhythm of human life and in this process it is mostly religion that comes to man's aid. To underestimate the role of religion in human life is to refuse to recognize reality.

What I found positive in the approach of the Soka Gakkai is their pragmatic approach to religion. Staunch Buddhists they are, their adherence to the teachings of Nichiren, one of the greatest visionaries of all times, is complete. A second attractive side of the philosophy of the Soka Gakkai is their profound awareness of the infinite potential of human beings and the open encouragement they offer to the believers that faith is not blind but elevating and a strong force of liberation, Kosen-rufu being the aim. It is a ceaseless endeavor to realize the Ultimate Truth as defined in the Mahayana Buddhist traditions. It is this that has virtually made the Soka Gakkai a movement not only of the present times but a people's movement of future. The amazing mass appeal it has received in almost all the continents of the world and in over 125 countries is a proof of what it offers. And it also indicates that a movement based on human considerations and where the members find ample opportunities to express themselves in terms of their aspirations could capture the support of the people.

The growth of the Soka Gakkai from a few thousand households into a mighty movement of several hundred millions of ardent followers, creating waves of happiness around in a world which is torn asunder by warring nations, shows how people's power can be harnessed for productive purposes. Both Machiguchi and Josei Toda nurtured the movement with spiritual and religious waters while the third President with the characteristics of a visionary, infused with uncommon vitality and dynamism took it to further heights to make it broad-based to achieve individual liberty so that a century of renaissance will follow spreading happiness. I consider this as central to human existence.

To the second part of the question whether I personally subscribed to their objectives, my answer was an emphatic “Yes”. This is individual choice. One of the saddest aspects of modern life is that man who prides in his stupendous achievements in different fields with the kind of spectacular success he has registered in science and technology, including the stockpiling of weapons of self_destruction, has almost lost his power to protect the larger interests of humanity by waging a ceaseless cam_paign against the forces and factors which threaten his existence.

The Soka Gakkai appears to be aware of this and in all their activities man gets supreme consideration and they ensure for joyful participation in the activities. I have seen with my own eyes several thousand men, women, children, inspired senior citizens with the flags of Soka Gakkai in their hands marching, singing, swaying their bodies with grim determination that as faithful disciples of Nichiren Daishonin Buddhism they will promote understanding and peace everywhere-some_thing that made me sit up and I wondered several times what is this all about. The answer came quickly whenever I was assailed by these thoughts that a leader who is inspired by noble souls like Nichiren and Toda, to whom propagation of faith was supreme because of their conviction that religion was being misused by those who did not care for the teachings of Shakyamuni will be loved and admired by the people and this is the secret of the phenomenal success of the present president Dr. Daisaku Ikeda (Sensei), a leader of immense perception, penetrating vision, admirable sagacity and farsightedness and who could put the interest of humanity above self and invite -hardship for the betterment of his followers and the society he tries to improve. This invariably means drastic change which includes change in the attitude of people who over the centuries have become powerful and acquired power, wealth and influence. Revolution need not mean violent overthrow of a system. Revolution could indicate attitudinal and structural changes through awareness creation in which education, culture religion, spirituality, ethics, literature, arts, photography, dialogue, exhibitions, poetry, exchange of scholars, all could be involved. This is exactly what Ikeda Sensei and the Soka Gakkai are doing at the moment. Naturally and predictably a strong movement and a strong personality will invite strong reaction from orthodoxy and Ikeda too has his share.

It will not be out of context here to take a look at what is happening around us and understand the significant role the SGI plays in securing a global human family which recognises respect for human life.

The last five years of this decade has witnessed far reaching developments of unprecedented magnitude at the global level and these developments are poised to influence the future course of history of mankind. Strange and isolated as they appear, they all began with the Tianenmen Square resistance. Protest of millions of Chinese students, the German unification, the Gulf war which exposed the deepening schism among the Arab nations, the dismemberment of Soviet Union and more painfully the eclipse of a world leader like Gorbachev, the tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in India and President Premadasa in Sri Lanka, improvement seen on the South African scene, the growing desire of the North and South Koreans for an eventual Korean unification, the end of Dr. Najibullah's rule in Afghanistan and more importantly the assertion of the UN of its role in ensuring the compliance of the decision of the world body-they all happened in quick succession. All this unmistakably indicates that the coming years will witness drastic changes at the international level and the world scenario will never be the same.

The historians and political analysts are busy analysing the fall-out of these epoch-making events which surprised a large section of world population. No doubt humanity is facing convulsions of different types. The menacing pace at which violence-violence in all forms including private and public-is spreading all over the world is sending shock waves. Humanity which has survived several crucial threats in the past has started wondering how to combat the demon of violence. It may be remembered that of all elemental passions and human expression violence continues to take precedence and it appears that this heartless monster is waiting on the wings to claim its pound of flesh of humanity, perhaps with more alacrity than Shylock or Mephistophiles the Shakespearean and Marlowean characters respectively This situation should lead to an agonising appraisal of everybody's role in the changing world scenario.

Violence and poverty have become probably the biggest challenges of the twenty-first century. Besides these two old and formidable enemies of mankind, we have now the environmental crisis and the Earth, the dear mother earth needs urgent attention for preservation of life on Earth. I always remember a Kenyan proverb, “Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children.” It may be pertinent to remember in this context the warning of the SGI President Dr.

Ikeda, "Ecological equilibrium in the fields of soil, water and forest conservation, of energy dissipation or pollution, of gently erosion in the plant and animal kingdoms, of climatic, changes, is vital to global security and demands a new approach". The question is to what extent are we aware of the lurking danger which all of a sudden has become a reality ?

In one of the ancient classics of India, the Atbarva Veda , there are sixty-three verses which constitute the Pritbvi Sukta Hymns to Earth). These hymns integrate much of the thoughts concerning the earth and express powerfully, highlighting the needs of the human race on Earth. It further draws the analogy of the relationship between a mother and her children representing the symbiotic bond between the Earth and human beings. It also extols man's duty to protect Nature in all manner. In all respects it remains as an exquisite form of global thinking, humanism and scientific objectivity. Composed almost fifty centuries ago, this Sukta is most modern, though remained in oblivion till recently.

It appears that man has forgotten the fact that physically he is constituted on the basis of the harmony and order of the matter of the natural world and that his mental functions reflect the harmony and rhythms of that same order. When he destroys or interferes with nature he is exerting a destructive effect on his own mind and body. Hence it is important to remember that the destruction taking place now will have detrimental effect not only on the adult generation of today but also on posterity. Like thieves we plunder nature and never pause to think how long the wealth of nature in the form of underground water, minerals, the fauna and the flora, fuel, air and all the essential factors that keep our life going will last. In the same manner because of misplaced priorities and avarice of the rich nations to dominate, conquer and establish supremacy over other nations the world's wealth is being squandered away. Gandhi succinctly put, "there is enough for everybody's need, but not for everybody's greed". Does anyone realize that human avarice is the root cause for much of the trouble?

This world instantly take us to the question of relevance of movements of people in the name of religion. A mission like this is not easy to achieve because when someone tries to change a system, the system will fight back. What is required is courage-undying courage to stand up arid- fight for what one considers just. In fact human history has quite a few instances of such heroic fights and the one great truth is that in the end the victors are always those who stand for justice and truth. This is what Dr. Ikeda and the SGI and demonstrating at present and it is heartening to note that several million followers, admirers, and believers appreciate the value of the fight and stand like one man wishing Dr. Ikeda success in his fight. Probably we may have to look back to the days of Emperor Ashoka to illustrate this point further and understand the value of what is happening around us.

Emperor Ashoka knew well that his prestige as a ruler and the very existence of this kingdom depended very much on his winning the war. He could take no more risks. Hence nothing else mattered with him on his resolute march to a decisive victory in the bloody battle. And finally he won the battle and by winning it, he thought he was adding one more feather of great achievement to his cap. The full-throated cries of victory assured him that the war was over and it was time to commence the victory procession. He looked around. Strewn around him were dead bodies of brave soldiers who were in the prime of their youth. The stench of human flesh filled his nostrils and it made him difficult to breathe. Pools of human blood, broken chariots and dead and wounded horses and elephants all seem to be mocking at him. The agonizing last cries of those who were not yet dead and the wailing of several thousand widows, orphaned children and old parents seemed to haunt him and accuse him of massacre, murder and utter destruction. The victorious emperor sat down staring at his victims. He started searching for the man in him and the disturbed and shaken Emperor knew not peace of mind until he took refuge in the great Buddha. And the rest is history-the glorious beginning of a new chapter in human history.

Let us take another instance. This time from the Mahabharat, one of the epics of India. This religious book is reverentially read every day in most of the orthodox Hindu homes in India. This vast epic of over one hundred thousand couplets is the longest poem in the world. About four-fifths of the poem are stories, and they are centered around the main story which is the story of a fierce war fought for eighteen days. The war is presented as one between the forces of goods and evil. The war described in great detail might be symbolic as Gandhi pointed out or it may even be based on historical facts. The story centers around the sons of two brothers. The Kauravas and Pandavas as they are called and represent evil and virtue, respectively. Lord Krishna who tried to mediate to avoid a fratricidal war had

to accept defeat and finally the opposing sides moved to the battlefield with their supporters and armies to settle their dispute. The world famous Bhagavadgita describes the dialogue between Krishna, the charioteer, and Arjuna, the most fierce and valiant among the fighters. Arjuna who was full of fire and fury became dispirited when confronted by several hundred friends, relatives, teachers, 2~A ~olleagues among the soldiers in his opposite camp. He asked himself, "Why should I kill all these and how should I kill and what for?" He put down his bow and arrows and sat down. Krishna had to explain to him that it was a fight for justice and he had to face it. Are we going to allow the forces of light in us or the force of darkness to win.2 And yet how easy not to fight and to find reasons to withdraw from the eternal 'battle' that confronts man in every walk of ~ life. As Juan Mascaro, one of the translators of Bhagavadgita said, "Arjuna becomes the soul of man and Krishna the charioteer of the soul....When we think of the chariot of Arjuna we can remember the image of a chariot in the Upanishads, in Plato, in Buddha, in Blake, in Keats. Of these, the most interesting for spiritual purposes is the chariot in Buddhism, which is called, 'He that runs in silence' ; the wheels of the chariot are 'Right effort' ; the driver is Dharma or truth. The chariot leads to nirvana, the Kingdom of Heaven. The end of the journey is 'The land which is free from fear.'

The goal of all teachers of humanity was to free mankind from fear. As Krishna tells Arjuna in the Bhagavadgita, whenever there is a decline of values, the Lord appears to uphold virtues and remind humanity of the necessity to move along the right path. In Sanskrit there is an expression to describe the Buddha, Thathagadhan, an expression which epitomizes the full extent of the message of the Buddha. In the Gita Krishna says "Freedom from fear, purity of heart, constancy in sacred learning and contemplation, generosity, self-har_mony, adoration, study of the scriptures, austerity, righteousness, nonviolence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, aversion to fault-finding, sympathy for all beings, peace from greedy carvings, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, energy, forgiveness, fortitude, pu_rity, goodwill, freedom from pride-these are the trea_sures of the man who is born for heaven."

Don't we hear the gentle voice of the Buddha here?

It goes to the credit of Nichiren Daishonin in Japan over seven hundred years ago to interpret Buddha's teachings against the contemporary realities of life. And it is no wonder that Nichiren's teachings assumed great significance and relevance in the emerging social and religious context. Nichiren's approach to human prob_lems and the method he suggested to overcome them are unique and revolutionary. As one commentator puts it:

"It reflects his firm conviction that one's spiritual condition must find its expressions in character and behaviour's belief based on the oneness of mind and body, the oneness of spiritual and material, a fundamental principle of Buddhism. Furthermore, he condemns those who claim that their spiritual achievement exists apart from character and behaviour. As he states," the real meaning of the Lord Shakyamuni Buddha's appearance in this world lay in his behaviour as a human being."

Nichiren lived six hundred years before Gandhi. Even a cursory look at their vision of humanity would reveal amazing similarities though they expressed them_selves in two different idioms, Nichiren from a religious, spiritual and ethical point of view, while Gandhi did it through a series of experiments which included political activism, religious practices such as purificatory fasts, prayer and giving up self-interest. What links these two is their unmistakable and profound respect for all life-an ideal which they were not ready to compromise. While Nichiren rose to the level of a visionary or prophet through his superb interpretation and analysis of the core of the Buddhist vision of life, Gandhi's life was rooted in India's religious tradition with its emphasis on willing readiness to sacrifice all in the process. He lived what he advocated, in every sense of the term. Dressed in loin cloth he lived in the most simple manner one could imagine. As he said, his life was his message to humanity. He rose to the level of a Mahatma-a great soul-one of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

It is extremely gratifying to note how the Soka Gakkai movement from the days of the first President to the unbelievably energetic visionary, third President tries to keep Nichiren's Buddhism as the main axis of the kosenruffu they have undertaken. True Buddhists they are, the SGI with their concern for humanity, have been involved in the creation of a new international order based on profound respect for all life. Their adherence to Nichiren's Buddhism and Lotus Sutra does not blind them or reduce them to being dogmatic. Theirs is a vibrant, creative and healthy vision of the world. The amazing manner in which their activities increased under the present President speaks volumes of the SGI's realistic awareness of the basic problems that confront contempo_rary society. When one looks around

to see similar efforts, none else comes to be seen anywhere in the world. The SGI has weathered many storms and they are poised for greater strides and achievements. What Gandhi said assumes importance in this context. "I do not want my house to be closed in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them. Mine is not a religion of the prison house. It has room for the least among God's creation."

The Gandhian concept of reverence for all life has not been found to be a mere statement of what is true, but a useful guide to being truthful, for the Gandhian concept of truth is not a virtue or principle but a process. Gandhi himself acknowledged how in his early years he was influenced by the Buddhist and Jain traditions and how his understanding of the essential teachings of these religions helped him formulate his theories and shape his life. "It is my conviction that all the great faiths of the world are true, are God-ordained and that they serve the purpose of God and those who have been brought up in those surroundings and those faiths. I do not believe that the time will ever come when we shall be able to say there is only one religion in the world....Religion is one tree with many branches. As branches, you may say, religions are many, but as a tree, religion is only one." Gandhi said.

Gandhi held the view that every religion was an unending quest, not a body of dogmas but a science of the spirit. And he saw scriptures as scientific texts containing profound but corrigible wisdom. Thus his religion was a rational and ethical one. He would not accept any belief blindly if it did not appeal to his reason or satisfy his ever-questioning conscience. This explains why he differed substantially from many others in his conception of religion. "By religion, I do not mean formal religion, or customary religion, but that religion which underlines all religions, which brings us face to face with our maker." He explained in unmistakable terms several times that he was endeavoring to see God through service of humanity, for he knew that God is neither in heaven nor down below, but in every one of us. Indeed religion should pervade every one of our actions, and religion here does not mean sectarianism. It means a belief in ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen." Gandhi created several uncomfortable moments to the advocates of orthodox religions practices when he thundered, "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal?"

Gandhi's greatness lies in the manner in which he could successfully extend the principle of nonviolence from the individual to the social and political plane. He affirmed that nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind' and it is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man. Gandhi's entry into politics was for the purpose of experimenting with nonviolence and establishing its validity. To his critics he said : "Some friends have told me lot me that truth and nonviolence have no place in politics and worldly affairs. I do not agree. I have no use for them as a means of individual salvation For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concerns nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concern of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words, a seeker after God and Truth. For me God and Truth are convertible terms, and if anyone told me that God was a God of untruth or a God of torture, I would decline to worship Him. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven." Gandhi said, "Truth is God." And to realize God, sathyagraha and ahimsa are the means.

"All my actions have their rise in my inalienable love of mankind," Gandhi said. "I have known no distinction between relatives and strangers, countrymen and foreigners, white and coloured, Hindus and Indians of other faiths.... All men are brothers and sarvodaya (welfare of all) should be our goal."

Gandhi demonstrated in South Africa and in India that nonviolence could be used effectively for solving problem both national and international. Gandhi declared with passionate conviction:

"Nonviolence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law-to the strength of the spirit." In short, Gandhi was trying to lay the foundations of a new world order through nonviolence and satyagraha.

There is a remarkable similarity in the Gandhian vision and Soka Gakkai perception, particularly in their views on religion, education, goal of life, justice and world peace. The Gandhian assertion "Religion is service to the helpless" is an extension of the Buddhist perception of happiness through service. The Tolstoyan vision of religion as "selfless commitment in service of humanity also compels our attention at this stage. Look at the following assertion of Gandhi: "I could not live for a

single second without religion.” Many of my political friends despair of me because they say that even my politics are derived from my religion. “I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion means being bound to God . . . Politics concerns nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religious in other words, a seeker after God and Truth.”

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means being bound to God . . . Politics concerns nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religious in other words, a seeker after God and Truth.”

In four years time from now humanity would enter the twenty-first century. Despite all the impressive gains mankind has achieved in the present century through intelligent harnessing of science and technology which brought in unexpected and unimaginable results in various fields, the world today is in the throes of several global crises. Conflicts and tension of all sorts are increasing, sending shock waves all around. With the disappearance of Soviet Union as the leader of a block of nations, the world has become unipolar. If anybody believed that the cold war era has ended and humanity could live in peace henceforth, his hopes have been completely believed as could be seen from the various disturbing fighting and raging violence and senseless killings in various parts of the world. Notwithstanding all high sounding assurances on arms reductions and cuts in military expenditure, we see an alarming escalation in the production of lethal weapons. It is estimated that there is an annual worldwide consumption of 1000 billion dollars on arms alone. Even one-sixth of this huge amount is sufficient enough to remove world hunger in the next six years.

Over one hundred million human beings are living on an average annual income of less than two hundred dollars. More frightening than this is the revelation that by 2000 AD the world population which is now at five billion would cross the six billion mark. Ecological degradation and the callous manner in which precious non-renewable energy resources are being squandered in the name of progress have strated sending shock waves at least in some sensitive souls. It might be of interest to remember how President Ikeda and Josef Derbolav in their recently published dialogue, Search for a New Humanity, warn humanity of the impending danger. They feel that further technological progress should be under-taken only after a careful analysis of the general situation and humanity should not allow situations to go out from its control. The nagging question is what is the contribution of the present century to the easing of human suffering ? Hunger and disease, malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of basic school facilities, large-scale infant mortality, the several millions of people who do not have safe water to drink or who live in those veritable hells called urban slums or shanty towns - planners and administrators do not seem to be worried about this.

The SGI is one of the very important international movements which is quite concerned about these disturbing and degrading developments. It has demonstrated that it could generate waves of understanding around the world cutting across all human-made barriers. While the Soka education system aims at character development and value absorption, the cultural festivals, exhibitions, peace proposals, conferences on ecology, foster better understanding between people. The numerous dialogues President Ikeda has been holding with the ace intellectuals in different parts of the world, the goodwill visits he makes to the capitals and administrators of the leading nations of the world are meant to usher in a new era of peace and goodwill. A warless world, Global unity, Kosen rufu are the three principal areas of concentration of the SGI now, and Dr. Ikeda firmly believes that the only way to create global unity is to build a world civilization linking together all humanity which, while persevering and making positive use of the local traditions, will truly emerge international in texture and content.

There are quite a few motivated souls in different parts of the world who in their own way strive to usher in a new era of goodwill and co-operation and who are urging humanity to examine nonviolent alternatives. Prof. Glenn D. Paige of the Global Nonviolence Centre at Hawaii leads this group of Gandhian theoretician-cum-activists outside India. Stressing the need for setting up of a global center for nonviolence, Prof. Paige pledged in his lecture, “Gandhi’s Contribution to Global Nonviolent Awakening,” that “to realize such a community we must identify, bring together and advance the nonviolence spiritual, scientific, leadership, follower-ship, compassionately constructive and creatively courageous resources that are needed to bring it about. An analogy is provided by the contemporary achievement of placing a human being on the moon. Long considered an impossible dream, it rapidly became a reality when vision, will, skill, science technology, human organization, training, resources and public support were combined to make it possible. Something similar can happen in nonviolent global transformation as the historical preconditions for it to begin to converge and to interact with future vision. Furthermore, I believe that an institution to accomplish this is not a luxury but a necessity, as illustrated partly by the New York State Assembly’s unanimous response to violence within their society - the creation of an institute to promote nonviolence. The same logic is applicable on a global scale”. Explaining the scope and nature of the proposed nonviolent global institution, Prof. Paige said that it “should be inter-spiritual, inter-disciplinary, and international in composition. Its purpose should be to advance and combine vision, knowledge, education, training and action to assist

humankind to replace conditions of violence. Its structure, the nonviolent global institution should be patterned some-what after the United Nations, University which has its center in Tokyo.”

Prof. Paige himself has provided a nucleus of such an institution when he started the Centre for Global Nonviolence at Hawaii on second October, 1994. All of us who work in our own ways in different parts of the world to promote a nonviolent transition will have to come back together with single-minded devotion, for to wage peace, requires, if not more, at least the same application of mind, collective effort, dog-like devotion and untiring perseverance as we require to win a war. This is perhaps possible if only humanity achieves that level of understanding when misunderstanding, mutual fear, jealousy, exploitation, and tendency to dominate disappear in the warmth of understanding and harmony. Our aim should be, as Rabindranath Tagore sang long ago, a world

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free,

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth, towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert-sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

A global nonviolent awakening is the need of the hour and lessons from Hiroshima and Nagasaki should keep goading humanity into the imperative need for a warless world towards the achievement of which the SGI leadership under President Ikeda has dedicated all their efforts. The Soka education system, the cultural exchanges, the culture festivals, exhibitions, goodwill visits, dialogues, the peace proposals, mass campaigns and the other numerous programmes the SGI has been organizing all over the world with undying courage and optimism will definitely herald a new era of hope. It may not be an exaggeration to point out here that in recent times very few organizations have alone such yeoman service as the SGI to promote understanding between peoples. The exhibition they put up at the Fuji Art Museum at Tokyo on “Ashoka-Gandhi-Nehru: The healing torch” high-lighting the evolution of nonviolent social and political change down the ages, is a significant effort in the global nonviolent transition. The SGI and its President Dr. Ikeda seem to live up to what Plato said long ago, “There are always in the world a few inspired men whose acquaintance is beyond price.”

The value-creating society based on the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin which the SGI has been promoting, and the nonviolent society Gandhi propagated, converge and coalesce holding out great promise to the beleaguered humanity. Buddhism which is a religion of service to humanity and Gandhian teachings affirm the basic truth that “there is no religion without peace; and no peace without religion.” The onward march of humanity to a nonviolent social and political order has to be sustained by this truth to a great extent.

Daisaku Ikeda and World Peace

Three personalities, for quite dissimilar reasons, attracted considerable attention of almost the entire humanity during the

last three years. They are Dr Nelson Mandela, Dr Daisaku Ikeda and President Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton has been in the news as President of the United States of America and leader of the unipolar world in the post-cold war scenario. Dr Nelson Mandela's emergence as the rallying point of nonviolent resistance in the manner of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. for civil rights was a development of far-reaching consequence while Dr Daisaku Ikeda, the President of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) introduced a new style and strategy in promoting world peace through culture, education, exhibitions, dialogue diplomacy, youth exchange programmes which, he hopes, will usher in, what he calls, a "New Human Revolution and Renaissance". As the third President of Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Association), a cultural and educational movement initiated in Japan by Makiguchi, an eminent educator who dreamt of a new world order along the lines of the revolutionary interpretation of Buddhism by Nichiren Daishonin, Daisaku Ikeda has demonstrated the infinite potentials of collective action for world peace and achieved what historians might call the impossible. The Soka Gakkai which is only six decades old now from the humble beginnings of a handful of Buddhist lay believers coming together to create a new world order based on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin has now under the leadership of Dr Daisaku Ikeda become one of the biggest religious, educational and cultural movements of the post war period claiming over ten million adherents in Japan and several million followers in over 125 countries. The phenomenal growth of this movement, which has emerged as a model educational, cultural, religious and revolution-ary movement is largely due to the dynamic personality and ceaseless effort of its visionary at the same time pragmatic third President Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, a disciple of Josei Toda who himself was an unconventional social and religious reformer.

Any one who closely follows the activities of SGI and its present President may be tempted to ask the question: What is the secret of the success of this unbelievably simple and kind-hearted man who has become the teacher of millions of loyal followers in Japan and in several countries of the world? Is it his unflinching loyalty to his Master Josei Toda? Or is it the missionary zeal to propagate the ideals of the great movement Soka Gakkai of which he is the President? Or the messianic and dogged urge shown by him to spread the spirit and message of love and compassion among the peoples of the world by respecting dignity of human life eliminating all wars and thus ushering in a new era of peace and understanding among the nations of the world or his own inner call to work for the welfare of the fellow human beings and spread the message of the Law? Perhaps no single question will get us the required answer and probably all these put together will be the answer.

The Soka Gakkai founded by Makiguchi is based on the teachings of the thirteenth century religious sage and revolutionary, Nichiren Daishonin, who brought revolutionary reform in Buddhism in Japan on the basis of the Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. Shakyamuni Buddha, for reasons best known to him, did not provide people with a direct way to enlightenment but left much to rigorous self-conducted meditation and discipline to be adhered to and followed by those who believe in the Buddhist way of living. This led to very serious confusions and ordinary mortals interpreted differently the modes for attainment of enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra, one of the precious treasures of humanity, is a comprehensive treatise by defining inherent Buddha's nature in common mortals. According to it the Buddha attained enlightenment some time in the infinitely distant past. One of the areas on which the Lotus Sutra does throw light is on the nature of the law to which he was enlightened. As prophesied, Nichiren Daishonin appeared in the thirteenth century and established the law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. As against the rigorous methods suggested by the Buddha Nichiren simplified the procedure so that it is not abstract and difficult.

During Ikeda's tenure, membership expanded rapidly to its current level of over ten million households in Japan. At the same time membership outside Japan also began to expand. At present, some two million people in 125 countries and regions outside Japan are practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

With the aim of promoting a movement for a world without war and to usher in a value creating society through education and culture based on the principles of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, Ikeda founded a number of institutions and initiated quite a few impressive and innovative steps.

Among the Soka Gakkai-affiliated bodies of this type are: The Soka Education which includes Soka University in Tokyo and Los Angeles;

Soka Women's Junior College; high schools; junior high schools and an elementary school; the Min-On-Concert Association; the Fuji Art and Tokyo Fuji Art Museums; the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, and the Boston Research Center.

Meanwhile, to promote awareness of the importance of working actively for peace, the Youth Division of the Soka Gakkai has published an 80-volume collection of war experiences; carried out refugee relief fund-raising campaigns; held exhibitions and seminars; and conducted and published the results of opinion surveys.

Dr Daisaku Ikeda has been employing dialogue diplomacy as a very effective strategy in promoting awareness among people. Engaging in dialogues with the best brains in different fields in different parts of the world in an attempt to share, analyze, focus and critically examine common concerns and issues which are arising out of contemporary developments in various fields of human endeavours has been found to be extremely useful and rewarding in the sense that these dialogues reveal responses of profound significance and offered in an atmosphere of friendliness and ease and there is no trace of laboured intellectualism which very often characterises what comes out of most of the celebrities when called upon to react to specific issues.

First in this series was the historic dialogue with Arnold Toynbee. In the dialogue both the leaders agreed with each other expecting and hoping that in the near future mankind will certainly succeed in unifying politically and spiritually. A confirmed optimist that he is, Dr Ikeda is very hopeful in believing that this great change can be brought about voluntarily on terms of equality between all sections of humanity and without any trace of domination of one over another, an evil which Ikeda condemns unequivocally. It might be of considerable importance for readers to remember the fact that many of the projections made by both Toynbee and Ikeda came true later as situations with almost dramatic intensity and unbelievable speed unfolded in the eighties and nineties, generating tremendous faith in man's ability to forge ahead; though in this process violence and conflicts of unprecedented magnitude have also crept into the very vital areas of human concern. The dialogues when available in print became immensely popular and Ikeda Toynbee dialogue, "Choose Life" is now available in 17 world languages. Dr Ikeda held dialogues with leading scientists, thinkers, statesmen, artists, social workers, etc -a regular feature of his efforts to the comprehensive action programme for peace. Distinguished personalities like Aurelio Peccei, Bryan Wilson, Joseph Derbolav, Linus Pauling, Henry Kissinger, Dr Karan Singh, Johan Galtung are a few of the long list of scholars with whom Ikeda held dialogues for peace and development.

One very attractive aspect of every dialogue is the highly creative manner in which Ikeda is able to discuss the various issues from different perspectives without revealing even a trace of repetition-a remarkable aspect of a master-brain. That such an achievement is rare in human history speaks volumes of the great ability with which Ikeda has been able to involve in what he believes paramount importance to humanity's survival.

Dr Ikeda is being called upon to deliver lectures in many prestigious Universities around the world. The running theme of most of the lectures reflect his profound and dedicated efforts to promote a world without war and alarming material prosperity which causes at dangerous pace a highly deplorable spiritual impoverishment in both the East and the West. One very important aspect of these lectures is the creative manner in which each differs from the other. The refreshing novelty of ideas that characterise each of his speeches indicates the continuous growth of the mind of the speaker who proves always that he has something new to say—a quality usually seen only in seers and exceptionally intuitive minds whose imagination and sweep of vision travel much faster than that of others. With prophetic depth and awareness he seeks out alternatives based on speculative aspects of social and generic changes and on eternal principles that enrich and sustain human life. This will be possible if only one's mind is clear and always sensitive both to the eternal aspirations of man in conformity with the Ultimate Reality that governs the attainments of man and to the longings of the soul to reach out to the service of the spiritually starved millions who for want to proper guidance and support tend to embrace the philosophy of Dr Faustus as depicted by the English dramatist Christopher Marlowe. Humanity appears to have been caught in the tentacles of such monsters created by scientists like Frankenstein of Mary Shelley and what one hears almost everywhere is the agonized cry of Dr Faustus. It is this extremely disturbing situation that Dr Ikeda analyses in his East-West Centre (Hawaii) address in January 1995. The speech "Peace and Human Security: A Buddhist Perspective for the Twenty-first Century" refreshingly free from any trace of scholastic jargons and academic verbosity which usually

characterise most of the speeches of specialists exudes assurance and beauty which normally are associated with the symphony of Beethoven.

It certainly disturbed those who were listening to him when Dr Ikeda pointed out that the distinctive contribution of the twentieth century is how it “enhanced the structures of society and state, labouring under the delusion that this alone is the path to human happiness.” True, while there has been a skyrocketing of things materialistic what eludes humanity is peace and happiness. A spiritual void looms large and insecurity has gripped humanity and what one sees is the total absence of the will for the reformation of the inner life of man, otherwise a genuine human revolution. With convincing sincerity Dr Ikeda enlarged in the course of his speech “the three transformations that we face on our way towards the twenty-first century: from knowledge to wisdom; from uniformity to diversity; from national to human sovereignty.”

A prolific writer that he is, his magnum opus is the ambitious fictionalised series *The Human Revolution*. What he has written in its preface sets the tone for what it is: “Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed that the “power of spirit” is stronger than the atomic bomb. To transform this century of war into a century of peace we must cultivate limitless inherent power of human life.” The fictional recreation of the great changes the world has seen and the triumphant achievement of certain objectives which were dear to a group to whom establishment of a world without war, a society where there is no injustice, a social order where the individual is respected, an international order which promotes universal brotherhood of mankind and religion playing a creative role in establishing human destiny is not an easy task for any author to attempt. In 30 volumes, by the time it is completed, the *New Human Revolution* seeks to highlight the joys and sorrows, dreams and aspirations, achievements and failures, certain spirited souls encountered in translating their master’s dream into reality. The incredible optimism, which drives the author to embark upon a seemingly unattainable course of activities, is what characterises and distinguishes this work as something special and precious. It is refreshing to note what the author indicates in the Foreword, “I have been writing the new human revolution as my life’s work. In it, I am determined to continue to record to the limits of my ability, the diamond-like genuine path of master and disciple and depict [a] grand portrait of glory created by the precious children of the Buddha as they have advanced. Truth and falsehood, good and evil, winners and losers—all will be rigorously depicted. I cannot help thinking that President Toda is steadfastly watching me.” Thus it becomes even at the first instance an epic of the glory of the master and disciple relationship. The sanctity and the steadfast loyalty with which a disciple tries to live up to the expectations of his master, unmindful of the difficulties and obstacles that hamper the progress of work almost at every stage with incredible ferocity, will remain in human history as one of the most inspiring efforts.

The United Nations, that great sentinel of hope of mankind has thoughtfully stressed the adage that since wars begin in the minds of men it is in the hearts of man that the mosaic of peace is to be built.⁽¹⁾ All great visionaries who left their indelible impressions on the sands of time are those who worked on this positive aspect of human endeavour. The support and help Dr Ikeda and his movement offer to the UN is also remarkable.

Perhaps the SGI and the President will go down in history when the history of the UN since its inception about fifty years ago would be written as one of the most reliable and consistent supporters of UN. Very few agencies or individuals could claim to have done as much as SGI and its president to promote the UN during its most difficult period. Dr Ikeda does not see the UN as the scapegoat for the problems that reflect our own shortcomings. It is not the UN that has not lived up to our expectations but we who have not lived up to the ideals of the UN. By improving ourselves and our politicians, we can improve the UN. Dr Ikeda has pointed through his work to promote the ideals of the UN that the UN offers every nation an opportunity to participate in the work for peace and a better future. It also offers a machinery for cooperation between the large and the many smaller states in the world. It guarantees the survival of humanity. The cherished goals of the SGI are:

One earth, one environment and one humanity.

The Cultural Festivals the SGI has been organizing and the other significant programmes and the tremendous support they offer to the UN are proof of the profound conviction of Dr Ikeda that there is no alternative to the UN and the future of humanity lies within the UN. Two festivals organized recently in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the UN deserve special mention in this context. The manner in which several thousand dedicated members of the Soka Gakkai; who affirmed their faith and devotion to the ideals of the UN and their resolve to march forward under the leadership of Dr Ikeda to promote world peace by strengthening the UN, was the main theme of the items presented at

the Cultural Festival at Kansai in Japan a couple of years ago and the message emanated from the festival reverberated several weeks in the minds of all who attended it.

Another Cultural Festival, the Thirteenth World Youth Peace Festival, held at Hawaii just after a day of the historic speech of Dr Ikeda at the University of Hawaii on 26 January 1995 was yet another triumphant expression of the resolve of several thousand youth representatives from different parts of the United States and eight other nations to work united to strengthen humanity's efforts to live in peace and with dignity. The tremendously impressive and captivating items presented before the five to six thousand youth who had gathered at the Paradise Cove eloquently proclaimed the determination of both the organizers and participants to work united for world peace.

Dr Daisaku Ikeda, a witness to what war could do to fellow-human beings, has become a symbol of humanity's urge to live peacefully in a world which will be free of war and destruction. The UN recognition of his role in promoting human brotherhood when it conferred on him the UN Peace Award and numerous international awards, degrees, citizenship showered on him from all corners of the world speak volumes of the phenomenal growth of this rustic sensitive youth into one of the most prominent peace makers of our times.

A multi-faceted genius that he is, his contribution to the world of poetry and photography is of very high order. His *Rendezvous with Nature*, a multi-volume collection of photographs by him and several volumes of poetry reflect his profound humanism.

Poetry is the spiritual bond, that links humanity, society and the Universe.

The gaze of the poet,
Is directed at the heart;
He sees things as more than mere objects.

These are the opening lines of a poem that introduces the seventh volume of his photographs. It is this spiritual bond that links all humanity Dr Ikeda seeks to strengthen for peace at all levels. The resounding victory he has achieved in spreading the message of harmony is both an assurance and reflection of the determination which guided great men in their hours of trial. The road to a genuine pilgrimage is always long, so is the priority of a committed peace activist. Dr Daisaku Ikeda demonstrates this through his work.

(1) charter of UNESCO