

Green is Local: Local is Peace¹

- Ela R. Bhatt²

I

Asia is an ancient civilization, - not a mere economic block. In our region, we grew up with the vision of a world without fear, and without want; where there is freedom of speech and freedom of worship is a world we still strive for today. I am reminded of Mahatma Gandhi's words. He said political freedom is incomplete without economic freedom. It is only when people have both, political and economic freedom that we will get lasting peace.

Peace is about restoring balance in society. But today, our world is in a critical state of imbalance. Farmers who till the land and feed the world, themselves go hungry. Countries that have the most abundant natural resources are among the poorest. The working poor are the backbone of every nation's economy, and yet they go hungry. What is poverty, but a society's disrespect for human labor? Poverty is a form of violence perpetuated with the consent of a society. Poverty strips a person of his or her humanity, and poverty takes away their freedom. Nothing that compromises a person's humanity should be acceptable.

So what we are looking for or search for is the common-sense of green that is synonym to peace. A common- sense of peace is a bit different from conflict resolution.

Let me elaborate.

For woman her own self, the society and the universe are not separate. Therefore, her approach to international relations insists that we weave all three together for survival. Her perspective resists the idea of property, sovereignty, this perpetual division into 'us' and 'them'.

I would emphasize that poverty and deprivation are a form of violence. Poverty and deprivation of many often results from unequal distribution, from a reduction of productive work, from a cornering of assets and from taking too much from nature. Conflict resolution tends to ignore the violence connected with poverty, work, subsistence, the needs of the economy and the growth of the informal economy and even the whole question of how a search for economic excess can be a source of war.

The feminine way seeks to argue about restoring basic balance with love and tolerance. These are not just sentimental words but as relevant as Human Rights, and, Compact.

Let me explain how green becomes peace at the Thought level and Practice level.

1. We need to bring Nature into the peace process. Living in balance with Nature is the most important starting point for peaceful stable existence. It is a tragedy when Nature re enters our lives only as climate change or resource conflict.

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- Nature is not outside us but as environment, energy, resource, is part of our way of life.
 - No economy can survive without the forest or farm as Nature, or with waste as an alternative resource.
 - Sustainability needs to look at the demands of subsistence society. As our UN General Secretary Kofi Annan wisely once said that Darfur is an example of climate change, a tragedy of Nature bereft of renewal.
2. We need to weave the notion of Work into any idea of sustainability. Work is not only a therapy and dignity, it is the first step of restoring peace.
- Both 'Man' and 'Nature' work. Nature works. This is the wisdom that we elders will have to testify too.
 - To ask how much are Nature's services worth is to convert value into price. Woman as an accountant feels that Nature's work adds more to GDP than the contributions of all the multinationals. Our current models of governance will need to understand this.
 - Work as a concept links Nature and culture. Nature's work and woman's work are central to sustainability for substantive peace.
3. In any dialogue for peace, communication-representation-participation are integral part of a singular process.
- Our world-view of a good life is sustainable peace as ordinary people understand it. Now we call it green. The Millennial Development Goals and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights survive not because of the approval of state but because they have passed the test of the common people. For woman, her daily survival, daily work, the day to day coping with society and family is her form of peace, as important as conflict resolution is for the state.
 - Green is plural, not single. It takes many forms, many shapes and is understood in many ways and different communities can celebrate it differently. The resilience of green as a whole derives from this diversity.
 - An ordinary common person's theory combines size and scale. Scale means proportions, a sense of limits, it links organizations, resources, consumption, technology into the sense of sustainability. In fact, scale per se is sustainability.

Sustainability begins with life. And life is about relations. In the green way life links to lifeworld to livelihood, to lifestyle, to life chances and the life cycle. This needs wisdom with expertise. Peace is about life support systems and about the quality of life.

The feminine idea of problem solving is constructive. Her model of governance is built on the sustainable interactions of natural systems and human activity.

II

As I mentioned earlier, I understand that green is peace. We will feel peaceful only when our life is green. So, I believe, peace is the only 'go forward' to be green.

Globalization has come at a crisis point. Middle road is the road forward, I believe. Restoring balance is the crucial challenge before the world today. We need to work on that. It is meaningless to argue for and against, and spoiling time, resources, relationship in proving your point. We have no time, nor resources for that, today. We work on balance – which is peace building, I believe that is green.

Moreover, we had more than enough of abundance. But abundance is not going to go further. We all know it. All should know it – those days are gone.

Many peace initiatives are going on at present, worldwide, we know. Unfortunately, the latest learnt do not get transformed into the mainstream – nor in our lives and livelihood.

My idealism came from the weak and the meek, in this crowded world. Undoing of poverty is the natural consequence of wanting to restore the balance. This fact no one – not even a child can ignore.

Poverty is the violence cutting deep through life totally with the consent of the society – that violence poverty has to be stopped. It kills everyone including the Mother Earth. That is my idealism.

So, how? – what else?!

Go back to our Gurus.

Go to your roots. It is the local where our world exists. The roots are getting lost, beware. The fact that struck me the hardest when I heard two Ghana farmers say : “What we eat we do not produce, what we produce we do not eat”!

In this context, let me humbly say one idea that I think, I have learnt and have been pursuing is the what I call the 100 Miles Principle. I am field testing this concept in concrete terms, at present. I see this as a possible way out of the present mess (muddle?) that we all are thrown in.

The Concept :

Here I wish to suggest my 100 Mile Principle that stems from the ecology of food that we see being ruthlessly violated today.

Therefore, I would urge us to see that our six basic primary needs are met from sources within 100 miles around us. These primary needs are: food, shelter, clothes, primary education, primary healthcare and primary banking.

It is about building local ecologies, local economics and maintaining diversity. The 100 Mile Principle weaves decentralization, locality, size, and scale into livelihood. What one needs for livelihood as material, as energy, as knowledge should stem from areas around us. Seed, soil, water are forms of knowledge that need to be retained locally. Security stems from local innovations, not distant imports. Let us begin the Principle with our daily staple food. Essentially, the organic human link with Nature has to be restored. The millennia-old link between production and consumption has to be recovered. Ultimately, the Nature as cosmology is the weave of life. Let us weave it tight.