

# Peace Education in India: Possibilities and Challenges

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## Abstract

*Peace education is an emerging field of study that has attained full acceptance in many countries, and is on its way towards development in many other parts of the world. The world is becoming more of an unsafe place to live in. There are threats in many forms against survival. Peace has become devoid in the day to day lives of people in all spheres of society, culture, politics and economics. Therefore it is essential to impart knowledge about peace and reconciliation post conflict, as that would help build a nonviolent approach towards conflict, and encourage to develop skills and values promoting reconciliation, and nonviolence. Once the right knowledge, skills and values are transmitted, transformation begins as people understand the root cause of conflicts and explore ways to address the challenges. Peace education is both educating on the peace content as well as educating for peace. The paper discusses the objectives of peace education and how it can be implemented as an effectual academic discourse either by integrating it within the curriculum or through extramural activities. It also looks into the challenges and possibilities of a higher learning that shapes the mind and spirit of the learners as much as their intellect.*

**Keywords:** Peace Education, Reconciliation, Possibilities, Challenges

Peace education is generally understood as two different ideas. First, it is considered as education on peace related content in order to build the knowledge of the learners about war, conflicts and peace, in order to make them aware of the causes, consequences and the need of choosing peace over conflicts. Ian Harris, a professor of Peace Studies, has it that peace education is any attempt to teach about violence and alternatives to violence. Another idea of peace education is a reference to the implication of education for peace, which is, educating people to instil in them values of peace to promote peaceful behaviour, thus, shaping a better society through education. Though these are different perceptions on education, they do intersect at some point in the process and missions of peace education. Betty Reardon, one of the most eminent peace educators of USA, defines peace education as

... [the] transmission of knowledge about the requirements of, the obstacles to, and the possibilities for achieving and maintaining peace, training in skills for interpreting the knowledge, and the development of reflective and participatory capacities for applying the knowledge to overcoming problems and achieving possibilities. (26)

Over time, peace education has branched out into several disciplines of Peace Studies, Conflict Management, Reconciliation Education, and such more. There has also been a shift in the subject of focus. Traditionally it focussed more on global issues of war and peace, whereas now it focuses on a range of conflicts from interpersonal, intercommunal to intercultural and international relevance. Peace education is implemented and applied in different methods according to the respective contexts; but a fundamental principle of peace building is to include inner peace as the base of social peace. Peace education has been a fully emerged concept and well implemented programme in many parts of the world, while in many countries like India, it has only recently been initiated. Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies founded in 1996 is an Indian research institution addressing issues of regional conflicts, nuclear wars, and internal security. The University of Madras has later established a peace education centre, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies, in April 2003, assigned to assist research in peace studies and to help evolve the concept of peace education in India through effective implementation strategies. It promotes interdisciplinary research on peace and conflict by taking in the challenges, and developing appropriate educational programmes based on that.

The role of academics in promoting peace education is millennial. Peace education can be incorporated in academics either by integrating it into other courses and subjects or through a separate educational project based on extramural activities. Ian Harris has classified peace education into five types, such as Global Peace Education, discussing international issues; Conflict Resolution Programmes, about negotiation and communication skills; Violence Prevention Programs, teaching about domestic violence and tolerance; Development Education, including environment education and human rights education; Nonviolence Education based on the teachings of historic peacemakers. Education is a strong weapon against wars, which is why there are so many courses and programmes based on peace and conflict resolution. The curriculum designed will vary according to the socio-cultural, economic and ideological contexts of different regions.

The possibilities of incorporating peace education in classrooms are innumerable. In order to implement peace education into the current educational system, the traditional teaching and learning processes have to be deconstructed. It requires a learner centric platform facilitating debates, discussions, dialogues and field work. It is all about developing a sense of shared understanding and negotiating through tactful communication skills. Peace education is not only about the content to be taught, but should also be the process and product of learning in itself. Students should be trained to develop a peace-making attitudes since childhood, and this happens only when peace education is embedded in the syllabus as an important element since primary section classes, and not simply as a superficial extracurricular activity in higher education learning which fails to create an impact. It can even be developed as an educational project focussing on peace and conflict resolution issues unfolding the needs and requirement of the knowledge about reconciliation narratives, the essence of developing skills and values leading to a peaceful behaviour. Most Indians quit formal learning after schools, and in such cases many do not even get an opportunity to know what peace education is at all. So it is better taught at an early age, as that is supposed to have more impact than learning about it as adults. At least the base should be laid at an early age, so that further knowledge can be built upon this strong base.

There are several challenges as well, regarding the implementation of peace education. Peace education in India is at the beginning stage of its development. It is thought that peace studies

and education is a luxury that only the developed countries can afford. The paradox of peace education is that the lack of awareness about peace and conflict management is the key reason why developing countries remain underdeveloped. Therefore, it is in these countries that education about peace has to be made mandatory, but unfortunately it is hardly ever effectively implemented in these countries, sometimes due to the lack of financial resources, and at other times due to the negligence of policy makers. In India there are hardly few institutions offering courses in peace education. Peace education has never been taught or practised as a solid academic discourse, as a single programme in itself with its own goals and visions. It has only been a part of other disciplines such as history, cultural studies, women studies, gender studies, political science, and defence studies, international studies. These departments mention issues of socioeconomic conflicts, peace, war, intercultural disputes, international conflicts and reconciliation strategies within their courses. But peace education is not possible through this curriculum, as there is no chronological sequence of episodes or chapters aimed at a deeper learning about these issues. Thus, this is not an effective strategy of education on peace content. Peace education should either be deliberately integrated into other disciplines or should be separately taught as a subject with a distinct curriculum and assessment framework.

Peace education in an Indian context requires much efforts to be successfully established as an efficient program. There are several challenges in the process of education, which can be dealt with more participation in such issues, by connecting universities and schools to such peace and conflict resolution organizations and institutions, to promote research in such fields and to evolve education mandatory, understanding the need of the hour for a peaceful atmosphere to live in.

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