

No war can be a just war

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YOU are the murderer
Your white TV face breathes
venom
while we sit tied quietly inert.
We get ready to see you kill.
You grow larger, stronger
than what we are
and than what you are.
You are human, not we are!
What kind of structure
could we build that could ever
save the world from you the killer!

That was Swedish poet Goran Sonnevi (translation mine) and the timeline -- 1965. Sonnevi first made his mark and heralded a period of politically committed poetry in Sweden, with publication of this poem "On the war in Vietnam". The poem caused extensive polemics in Sweden, and in America, about a poet's, any poet's or writers or artist's for that matter, ability to influence political and military events. "The poem about oppression has to originate not in our involvement, but in our disengagement. I believe, it is possible to turn disengagement into strength. We can not enforce, but we can stand outside and refuse to comprehend arguments advanced by the powers of oppression -- about the forces in motion, historical causes, protective strategies and so forth." wrote one critic in support. "On the war in Vietnam" was essentially a statement of the poet's moral indignation over the war waged by the United States. Sonnevi went on to develop that stance in a social democratic direction, which culminated in his book of 400 pages, more voluminous than his entire body poetic in 1975, named "The Impossible."

"On the war in Vietnam" came at a time when Sweden was under the spell of the poetry of Tomas Transtromer, the most influential poet of Sweden whose poems promenaded throughout the world like a restless tourist, but also at the same time faced criticism of being remote from contemporary world realities, as one simplistic critic questioned. "But is it looking for us? Certainly not. It is looking for images -- images of a solitude full of images of solitary individuals." This solitude and concurrent resort to nature are the

principal attributes of the poems of Transtromer, like Jibabananda Das, which inspired the present writer while on tour of duty in Sweden to translate Transtromer into Bangla that resulted in publication of the book entitled "Shuva Sandhya Hey Sunder Gabhirata" meaning Good Evening You Beautiful Depth, from Stockholm University in 1997. But there are situations when one feels like turning to Sonnevi from Transtromer, to Kazi Nazrul Islam from Jibabananda Das. We are now living, meaning sitting back in front of the TV, wondering about the amazing technical advancement compared to the times of these poets, and watching an enormous amount of smartkilling, superkilling, and overkilling of innocent people -- helpless women and children included -- along with combatants, to "liberate" the people of a land known as the cradle of civilization.

The world of wars

Murder, particularly mass murder, is caused by war, violence and conflict. War, in international law, is armed conflict between two or more governments, states or countries. When such conflicts assume global proportions engulfing a number of states in various regions, they are called world wars. War between conflicting communities or regions of the same country is called civil war. In between two world wars, World War-I of 1914-18 and World War-II of 1941-45, history of human civilization saw another kind of war -- the so-called cold war that persisted between two then power blocks of the world, i.e. the communist countries and the so-called free world meaning the industrialized developed countries of America and Europe commencing at the end of World War-II and ending at the fall of Soviet Union and its European satellites. We could conveniently call it World War-III, although there was no outbreak of violent hostility. A war is a war, in true sense of the word, if it is fought between two powers that approximately match each other's military might. Today's war, resulting from invasion of Iraq by U.S.A. and U.K with nominal participation of Australia and Poland is more of an aggression. In case, however, the present conflict

engulfs other neighboring countries this carries all the threats to turn into another World War. We may call it World War IV, "if you like" (like the "embedded" satellite media reporters).

War is older than history. It is perhaps destined to remain persist as in a post-history era, which can be expected to come after post-modern and post-development ages of human civilization. It is said, behind every war there used to be some women who inspired war or for whom war was

The first organised international efforts, since Congress of Vienna of 1815, to limit and regulate war were made through Hague Conferences (May 1899 and October 1907, attended by 26 and 44 countries respectively, both at the initiative of Russia). They aimed at working out principles to remove threats to international peace, resolve inter-country disputes through peaceful means, reduce armaments and ameliorate conditions of warfare to minimise non-combatant sufferings. Through three

war. Co-sponsor U.S. Secretary of State Frank Kellog (alongwith French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand) was awarded 1929 Nobel Peace Prize. The Pact bound signatories to renounce war as an instrument of national policy, leading to peaceful settlement of international disputes. This failed to prevent Japan's aggression of Manchuria in 1931, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and World War II. However, the Treaty was a significant step towards establishing the 20th century concept war as an outlaw act

In U.S.A the term "conscientious objector" applies to an individual who, out of personal moral conviction, opposes war and his own participation in armed combat. An American male citizen is classified as such if he opposes war in any form and eligible for exemption from military service. Conscientious objectors in the U.S. tend to be relatively small compared to numbers of men summoned for conscript. During World War II, when 15 million Americans served in the armed forces, 50,000 men were so

around the world to discuss ways of reducing the nuclear threat.

More of Russells and Rotblats

The great madness of World War I changed the vision of Bertrand Russell, who suddenly came out of the world of logic and mathematics, and burst into a liberated flame. The world was shocked to find that this slim and anemic professor was a man of infinite courage and a passionate love of humanity, who started preaching, "the growth of one individual or one community is to be as little as possible at the expense of another". The scholar stepped forth and poured out upon the most exalted leaders of his country a flood of polemics that did not stop even when they ousted him from his chair in the university, and isolated him, like another Galileo, in his narrow London quarter. But, men of lesser qualities, who doubted his wisdom, admitted his sincerity, but they were so disturbed by his amazing transformation that they slipped into a very un-British intolerance. The embattled pacifist, despite his most respectable origins, was outlawed from the high society, and denounced as a traitor to the country that nourished him, and whose very existence seemed to be threatened by the maestro of the war.

At the back of this rebellion by the frail professor was a simple horror of all bloody conflicts. To Bertrand Russell, the interests of an empire were not worth the lives of the far away people who perished at the wheels of an brutal war machine and of the young men who so proudly marched forward to kill and be killed. He devoted to work to ferret out the causes of the holocaust. He thought he found in socialism an economic and political analysis that at once revealed the causes of the syndrome, and indicated its only remedy. The cause was, according to him, greed, manifested in the form of insatiable lust for private ownership. The cure, he thought at that moment was communism, only to be disillusioned from his visits to Russia and China. All properties, he pointed out, are acquired through theft or violence. Since pri-

vate property is protected by the state, and the robberies through which properties are made are sanctioned by legislation, and enforced by arms and war, the state is a great evil. Visits to the East brought new perspective to the philosopher. In the midst of that vast humanity, he realized that the West is only the tentative pseudopodium of a greater continent, an older and perhaps a profounder culture. All his theories and syllogisms melted into a modest relativity before the mastodon of the nations, as he writes, "I have come to realize that the white race isn't as important as it used to think it was. If Europe and America kill themselves off in war it will not necessarily mean the destruction of the human species, or even an end to civilization".

War can by no means be regarded as an act of civilization. It is a primitive, barbaric and retrograde process of disintegration and dehumanisation. Notwithstanding world-wide wave of protests, support for the war dramatically increased in USA and UK since beginning of the "Operation Iraqi Freedom". At least 50 per cent of Americans would support this 'glorious' war even if 5,000 US troops are killed, and 47 per cent would support even if 5,000 Iraqi civilians died, while the western media would continue to euphorically appreciate the terrible "beauty of war". The people of the rest of the world feel, the world would undoubtedly have been safer for ordinary mortals had there been more and more of Grotiuses and Rotblats, and Einsteins and Russells. Then, we could enjoy more of Jibabanandas and Transtromers in absolute peace, in the bliss of unbroken divine solitude. Let the millions of Russells and Rotblats rise now instead of hundred Bin Ladens from the ashes of this war and save the peace-loving people of the world from all future wars, from hatred and greed, and from acts of violence, terrorism, tyranny and injustice. No war whatsoever, even if it is a jihad or a crusade, can ever be a just war.

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waged. Not now, perhaps. Acquisition of wealth and expansion of power and influence remains main objectives of war throughout the ages. Besides loss of life, it brings destruction, misery and suffering that is often immeasurable. Except for those who conduct war and take part in it, it is a detestable phenomenon. Many of the civilizations were built on fruits of war as many were destroyed by it. Whatever, war is a deviation from and distortion of the norm. It is a pervert act, short of civilization.

Prevention of war through pacifism

That is why there has always been opposition to, condemnation of and resistance to war. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Dutch jurist, whose legal writings led to foundation of modern international law, challenged the right of any nation to forcefully occupy the land of any other nation or to claim any part of the open sea. Such an act, he argued, was against basic laws of nature and humanity. He, however, contended that war could be condoned only if it is for proven righteous cause and all efforts to conciliatory settlement of disputes have failed, and then he called for humanitarian limits on such confrontation.

conventions, the first conference set up a mechanism for arbitration of contentious issues among nations in the form of what came to be known as the Permanent Court of Arbitration or Hague Tribunal. Other two conventions recognized customs and formulated laws of warfare to eliminate unnecessary suffering during a war, if started unavoidably, for all parties involved, whether combatant, non-

by the aggressor state on a victim state.

Pacifism emerged as an organised movement in opposition to war and other forms of violence during early 20th century. As a political movement or as an individual conviction, pacifism varies from an absolute doctrinal to more practical forms. Absolute pacifists are against all wars and violence in any forms whatsoever, while relative pacifists are selective

classified. By 1970, during Vietnam conflict, 21,500 conscientious objectors were registered, or about 1/1000 of the total number of military registrations (22 million) at that time.

Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, first held in Pugwash, Canada, a loosely structured organization that works to eliminate nuclear weapons and to reduce their influence in international politics has great contributions towards anti-war sentiment. Held since 1957, meetings of prominent scientists and individuals discuss arms control and peaceful solutions to international conflicts. Pugwash shared 1995 Nobel Peace Prize with Polish-born British physicist Joseph Rotblat, who helped found the conferences. Pugwash movement began in mid-1950s, when scientists became alarmed at the nuclear arms race between USA and USSR and at global threat to humanity. Seeking to curb proliferation of nuclear weapons, British philosopher Bertrand Russell and German-born American physicist Albert Einstein drafted a statement in 1955 known as the Russell-Einstein manifesto. The manifesto, which was signed by nine other prominent scientists, urged governments to renounce nuclear weapons and proposed a meeting of scientists from



combatant or neutral. The second conference resulted in adoption of 13 conventions clarifying and amplifying the understandings arrived at the first one. It provided for a third conference to be held within eight years that was thwarted due to outbreak of World War I. After 1919 and till formation of the United Nations in 1945, functions of the Hague Conferences were largely carried out by the League of Nations.

Meantime, the Kellog-Briand Pact, also known as the Paris Pact and formally the Treaty for the Renunciation of War of August 1928 signed by 15 nations and later almost universally ratified, became an important milestone towards efforts for prevention of

and occasional. Absolutists strongly perceive taking of one person's life by another under any circumstances as totally immoral, against divine will and social and economic rights. Attempting to prevent war, pacifists set four goals. A climate of feeling favorable to peace must be established; the potential causes of conflict, inherent in such factors as economic competition, quest for power, and fear of foreign domination, must be eliminated or minimised; means for the settlement of disputes must be provided, as in mediation, arbitration, and trial procedures; and finally, ways must be found to ensure observance of the settlements that are made.

