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National Imagination and Topology of Cultural Violence: Gandhian Recontextualization of “Violence” and “Peace”

Abstract:

Violence, as a concept, has shaped most of human history and discourse. Over the centuries, the concept has gone through dynamic evolutions and should be understood in relation to diverse agents such as nation, nostalgia, and culture. Modern society’s tendency to impede and constrain overt forms of violence has paved the way for covert forms to exist in socio-cultural spheres. Cultural violence is one such realization where aggression gets exercised covertly through heterogenous mediums such as language, regulations, mass media, and most importantly cultural practices. Its topological structures can be traced in national imagination and a sense of cultural nostalgia originating out of it, that ultimately formulates cultural “otherness.” In Gandhian philosophy, the absence of physical aggression is insignificant, if not complemented with the eradication of violence from the cultural and intellectual strata. Gandhi’s critique of exclusive nationalism and narrowness is reflective of a distinct kind of cultural topology that generates structural violence and with the due course of history it gets legitimacy to exert power over the cultural binary it constructed. The fundamental questions of the paper are

associated with assessing the role of national imagination and cultural imperatives in germinating the structures of violence in culture, exclusive nationalism, and Gandhian reconsideration of peace in the context of covert violence in the material and intellectual realms.

Keywords:

violence, cultural topology, nationalism, imagination, Gandhi, peace

“Violence, whether spiritual or physical, is a quest for identity and the meaningful. The less identity, the more violence.”¹

– Marshall McLuhan

Introduction

The divergent meanings of violence, which evolved through the course of scholarly discussions, have only problematized the concept further; but the wide range of applications in different socio-cultural spheres complements the very propensity. The percolation of meaning from aggression in physical states to aggression in emotional, ideological, and intellectual states presents an avenue for understanding it in a much wider context, which takes social, religious, literary, organizational, cultural, national, and many such contexts under its purview. The spread of violence in different realms cannot be realized without identifying its origin, influence, and the latent ideology nurturing it. On the contrary, this lacuna in identifying covert forms of violence in any sphere could normalize physical and gross forms of violence by giving a moral and intellectual backing that can “be used to justify the unjustifiable.”² This paper is aimed at unshrouding some aspects of covert violence from cultural spheres, which holistically encompasses the residual forms after civilizational ethos delegitimized violence in its ghastly and visible forms. In relation to topological aspects of culture, it can be applied to understand how national imagination ceaselessly kindles cultural nostalgia and the peripheral “other” “through a complex of mediations and represent.”³

The notion pertaining to national imagination can be best understood as a partisanship with cultural artifacts and symbols (such as the designated national flags, maps, languages, animals, phrases, and even everyday preferences such as food, fashion, and related choices), of mass culture and their subsequent appropriation into “national cultures.” When a camaraderie is forged solely based on an imagined network of symbols, it concretizes nation (as an entity and an identity to which one can subscribe), in the mental space. Henri Lefebvre in his seminal work *The Production of the Space* presents this “nation-space” relationship in two distinct, but complementing formations, namely “nation-markets” and “violence” and hypothesizes that these “two ‘moments’ indeed combine forces and produce a space: the space of the nation state.”⁴ Here, Lefebvre identifies the imaginary space exercised through a set of “commercial relations,” “communication networks and ‘controlling and exploiting resources of the market,’” and sees the culmination of the imagination into “a focused space embodying a hierarchy of centres.”⁵ The term “national market” is meant as the production

1) Marshall McLuhan, “1968 – The Summer Way with Norman Mailer” (Interview Clipping).

2) Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, 301.

3) Anderson, *Exodus*, 319.

4) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 112.

5) Ibid.

unit of material as well as symbolic artifacts that are often problematic to distinguish separately. For example, Gandhian usage of Charkha or the spinning wheel (and later its mass distribution), embodied not only material but a symbolic rupture in Indian politics and the anti-colonial discourse (especially against the capitalist mode of production and the predatory marketing practices in the British Raj). This formulated the identity of the nation (i.e., India under British rule), using a rudimentary commodity, historically associated with weavers, by impregnating it with cultural meanings beyond its functionalities. When attached with a patriotic fervor, it offers a network of socio-cultural meaning for masses to conform and build a culture around it. Gandhian claim on Charkha or the spinning wheel, “Is the symbol of the nation’s prosperity and, therefore, freedom. It is a symbol not of commercial war but of commercial peace”⁶ proves the point that topologically rational and the structural formations define the ethicality of the nation’s symbols and ancillary imagination nurturing them. This power dynamic is well reflected in the cultural politics of most forms of nationalism prevalent in our socio-political spheres by harboring aforementioned cultural propensities of creating power structures based on symbolic systems that Pierre Bourdieu sees as catalysts for “symbolic violence.”⁷ In Bourdieu’s hypothesis, the concept of “symbolic power”⁸ is described as a credence giving and perception morphing force, which is used to metamorphose social reality by means of having a monopoly over knowledge production. Its striking resemblance with national imagination is irrefutable in the context of the inner structures of cultural violence that try to extract moral legitimacy; as it is the moral apparatus that identifies acts as violent or nonviolent and even within that framework “just” or “unjust.” His proposition is that “Violence as a means is either law-positing or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, then it forfeits all validity.”⁹ It shows that the dialogic relationship between violence and law formation (established by the nation-state, in the context of the essay), manifests in the preservation and domination of the structure and its domination. The scheme of national imagination, in this respect, morphs its distinct topology to devise its own set of ideals and morals that justifies overt and covert forms of violence in a recursive framework. Thus, the cultural symbols born out of national imagination eventually generate a legal outlook and create a myth for its sustenance and historical acknowledgement: “The positing of law is the positing of power, and, in this respect, an act of an immediate manifestation of violence. Justice is the principle of all divine end-positing, power the principle of all mythic law-positing.”¹⁰

The dilemma of positing violence either as the means for achieving higher ideological aspiration or purely as an end, raises questions on the methods of philosophical inquiry. In Galtung’s theory, the meaning of “cultural violence” refers to the “symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science, and formal science (logic, mathematics) that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.”¹¹ It includes the comprehensive relation of perceivable reality that forms logic and praxis and defines the whole gamut of expression, from ethics to aesthetics of our actions and reasoning. Thus, cultural violence is a self-reflexive mechanism of inquiring about the functionality of culture to communicate the codes for aggression and espouses a culturological approach in its dealings. In this respect, the analysis of cultural violence as a core tenet of nation related discourse becomes truly essential as it can be read as both, a means and an end as its cultural structure kindles exclusionism and in return

6) Gandhi, *Young India*, 406.

7) Bourdieu, *Symbolic Violence*, 79.

8) *Ibid.*, 80.

9) *Ibid.*, 48.

10) *Ibid.*, 56.

11) Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, 291.

gains legitimacy from it, as Galtung tries to resolve this conundrum by seeing it as “transition from cultural violence to violent culture.”¹² In Galtung’s typology of culture, the symbolic and holistic agents dictating the conditions or prerequisites for peace or violence alike are differentiated from the overt forms of violence that he distinguishes as “classical violence.” Here, cultural peace is reflective of the “aspects of a culture that serve to justify and legitimize direct peace and structural peace.”¹³ Similarly, structural peace is the polar opposite of the notion of structural violence that resists the very propensity of “cultural violence” that “makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong”¹⁴ as it envisions peace among institutions, social spaces, and individual conducts.

But violence, whether in overt or in covert form, can only be realized in context of its contribution to the cultural dimension of peace. In M.K. Gandhi’s understanding, morality has its own sphere of existence as important as material and logical spheres¹⁵ and violence occurs due to the fallacy in that sphere. Gandhian assimilation of morality with the ontology of peace has introduced the aspects of truth and moral sense of justice as it is “cultural peace” that delegitimizes the moral authority of unjust actions and gradually forms “structural peace” in our cultural and intellectual spheres. However, the claimed “narrowness”¹⁶ of nationalist conceptions once applied, impede the process of establishing “structural peace” and necessitates discourses on the latent agenda of nationalism in inserting violence in cultural practices, and the ways to subvert and resist it. In Kantian critique, the concept of “violence” is deeply linked with aesthetics and sublimity¹⁷ and the politics of these elements are inherent in imagining a “nation.” In Kantian proposition, the nostalgia for overwhelming power alters value systems and therefore shapes human judgements, can be brought under the purview of the discourse. The nostalgic penchant for fear to move human judgments presents us with the conundrum that Kant has simplified through his expression: “We can, however, consider an object fearful without being afraid of it.”¹⁸ This proposition explores the linkage between the nostalgia for violence, and its cultural implications for building a culture dominated by either violence or peace, and gives way for the implications of the sublime being logical in the aesthetic sphere and legitimizing actions done in the ethical as well as material spheres. Gandhi’s critique of apparent sublimity is associated with the capability to use aggression as a form of state agenda; using the metaphor of “Tiger’s Rule” and “Tiger’s Nature,”¹⁹ It is primarily directed at the moral fallacy of human judgment. The hyperbolic and mythopoeic imaginations bypass moral reasoning and aesthetically weakens and discredits the ideas related to cultural peace, which can build an aversive atmosphere for the very discourse. The continuous search for violence’s expression in different identities makes critical studies in this field dynamic in nature and the following arguments can be better understood in the context of the discourses.

12) Ibid.

13) Ibid.

14) Ibid.

15) Gandhi, *Yeraveda Mandir*, 386.

16) Gandhi’s critique of nationalism was based on its exclusivity and the moral pretense of progress as mentioned in *Hind Swaraj*.

17) Huhn, *The Kantian Sublime*, 269.

18) Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 119.

19) Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 38. Gandhi, here allegorizes the fantasy and awe-inspiring nature of violence, but also warns about its troubled sense of morality that no one wants to share.

Nation as a Cultural Metaphor

*“The formation of the nation-state, and the associated nation-state system, is an expression of the dislocations of modern history.”*²⁰

– Anthony Giddens

The studies concerned with nation, nationalism, and identity conundrums have largely been preoccupied with topics such as historicity, modernity, and discipline. Conceptually, the notion related to nation has been dissected on numerous occasions, by numerous authors, and with various methods; and a large portion of them were directed at unveiling the driving forces and the covert ideology of the very concept. Whether it is Michel Foucault’s proposition of “biopower,”²¹ Benedict Anderson’s concepts in *Imagined Communities* or any other seminal work on nation and its politics, the tendency to see the topological aspects of culture and perform a deconstructive cultural analysis to resist the prevalent historical and social notion is quite popular in the field. In the Foucauldian concept of biopower, we come across the knowledge that legitimizes the right to harm or spare the human body in accordance with the requirement of the state, which has a “power over life,” just like the “ancient right to take life or let live;”²² but in the seventeenth century European milieu it was “replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.”²³ The creation and consolidation of disciplinary institutions (i.e., prisons, mental asylums, military cantonments, etc.) have bifurcated social life into “legal” and “illegal” spaces creating “docile bodies”²⁴ which would not disobey the judgements passed as the basis of their existence, is rooted in the value system produced by the very discipline. Over the years, this life administering power became the source of moral knowledge and due to its binary nature, the value systems formed became concerned not with morality, but with the ideological projections, codified as legality. Much of Gandhi’s criticisms of the imperial judicial and value system are directed at this lack of moral consideration of truth and he associates the notion with fear of European forces, “when a man abandons truth, he does so owing to fear in some shape or form.”²⁵ Although Gandhi never explicitly mentions the fears of imperial forces, from various cultural theories we can get to the inference that these are mostly of losing the hegemonic control of the production of knowledge and shaping episteme.²⁶

The knowledge in this way can push the aggression into a value system and make it seem like an essential part of any cultural structure and social reality and it is mostly achieved through “symbolic power”²⁷ that Pierre Bourdieu explains in his seminal work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. In Bourdieu’s proposition:

The struggles to win everything which, in the social world, is of the order of belief, credit and discredit, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition – name, renown, prestige,

20) Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, 34.

21) Foucault’s way of seeing discipline as a form of power. First explored in *The History of Sexuality*, later developed further with *Discipline and Punish*.

22) Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 135.

23) *Ibid.*, 138.

24) Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 75.

25) Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 105.

26) Bourdieu, *Critique of Anthropology*, 79.

27) Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 120.

honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as a recognized power – always concern the “distinguished” possessors and the “pretentious” challengers.²⁸

Within this framework the urge to dominate social reality and disguise itself at the same time appears to be a conundrum that is only realized with the use of different symbolic expressions. In the editorial of Pierre Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power*, John Thompson exegeses the very conundrum of the power-legitimacy perspective as “Dominated individuals are not passive bodies to which symbolic power is applied...Rather, symbolic power requires, as a condition of its success, that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it.”²⁹

“Nation” is one such symbolic expression that has been shaping our collective perception on social reality, regarding the self (i.e., nation and its ideologues, who must share the common aims produced by “legitimate authorities”), and the “otherness” since its inception. But in doing so it also distances itself from critical purview as it is a popular notion and it is, “shielded from scrutiny by the fact that any critical analysis of a notion which bears closely or remotely on ‘the people’ is apt to be identified immediately as a symbolic aggression against the reality designated.”³⁰ Much of this symbolism is expressed through the reciprocal codes such as “flags, maps, statuary, micro-cosmic ceremonials; at a more profound level, through ‘self’ and representative government.”³¹ These symbols reflect the covert power structure that persuades the masses into imaging their ontological existence in relation to their national identities and what does not constitute “nation” (i.e., the “Other”) as well. It is neither an objective fact nor subjective experience that materializes the abstraction into practice but the imagination, as Ernest Gellner proposes, “Nationalism is not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force, though that is how it does indeed present itself. It is the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state.”³² The inorganic association between the conceptual framework of a nation and its codification into knowledge is achieved through turning its concepts and practices into a metaphoric entity.

Metaphor is a semantic trope that enables the transposition of the meaning of a given concept, action, or work with something else that is incompatible with it in the literal sense. Metaphor’s wide-ranging effort inherently frees itself from the literary or linguistic fields of research and can be understood in varied contexts. The very concept of culture is marked by dynamism, non-identity, and dislocation of historical understandings, which can be understood in context of socio-historical realities. When culture transposes its contents and presents itself in the garb of metaphors, the process of metaphorization of culture and the produced symbols reaches its completion. The metaphoric displacement, as understood by Aristotle “implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars”³³ and in the purview of our study, the assemblage of different symbols brought under one category poses the question over the relationality of the artifact and its latent agenda. To exemplify, the symbols of Gandhian ascetical politics, such as Charkha (or the spinning wheel), regional languages, and village development are seemingly unrelated in their functionality, but under the dream of an alternative nation (against the Imperial identity as well as a highly centralized nation, in line of

28) Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 25.

29) Ibid., 91.

30) Anderson, *Exodus*, 319.

31) Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 48.

32) Ibid., 46.

33) Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 4.

western formations, envisioned by Indian revolutionaries), they create a unified base for the opposition of prevalent cultural symbols of early twentieth century India such as Mechanized Industries, English education, urban migration, and so on. Gandhi's cultural politics lies in imbuing dissimilar symbols with a unifying and somewhat utopic logic that formulates a law and an obedient community (i.e., *Satyagrahi* or truth seeker community, who followed Gandhian ascetic ideals in politics and inserted it in everyday discourse of India under British Raj) to conform. Thus, national imageries transpose its agenda through cultural artifacts and claim them as national cultures by means of displacement, thus, the violence inflicted is understood not by the referent or the thought, but by the symbol. Regarding nation's imagery, the cultural metaphor becomes the primary medium of communicating the state agenda to the masses "because a culture tends to understand itself by crystallizing its convictions in keywords."³⁴ Regarding the nation's imagery, the cultural metaphor becomes the primary medium of communicating the state agenda to the masses. The communication of the stereotypical and highly categorized cultural metaphors became the bedrock of nation as a concept as per Benedict Anderson who stated: "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation."³⁵

Cultural metaphors transmit the nostalgia for the "pure" and justifies the peripheralization of the "impure" and through practices, designated as "national" (i.e., national language, national sports, national animal, national heritage, national interests, etc.), inserts the state agenda in every possible sphere of culture and ancillary discourses. The imagination of the "Nation" is therefore an imagination of a "political community," which is "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."³⁶ Its image is associated with something that it is not, just like the flags, codes, practices and so on, but the usage of metaphor presents these as the identification markers of a nation and transposes them for the nostalgic charm to get one specific identity, a distinction marker and a sense of belonging, which Anderson terms as "the magic of nationalism" that "turn[s] chance into destiny."³⁷ The imagined otherness and the revised ethics that nationalist culture tries to project as absolute are merely born out of chance. In this regard Anderson tries to present a probability, and questions the lack of fluidity of the nationalist project: "If one migrated from a village in the delta of the Ganges and went to schools in Calcutta, Delhi, and perhaps Cambridge; if one bore the indelible contaminations of English and Bengali; if one was destined to be cremated in Bombay, where was one intelligibly to be home, where could one unitarily be born, live, and die, except in 'India'?"³⁸

The unstable relationship between the projection and reception of the meaning and its self-consciously grasped political ideology is what cultural metaphor tries to bridge by presenting a symbolic image reflective of the symbolic power of the nation. In the process it alienates the originating force and displaces the "original" and "conceived" meaning for some archetypes and stereotypes. This propensity of the cultural metaphor limits nation and imagination related to it into some culturally agreed codes, which due to their "popularity" cannot be held accountable for inspiring overt or covert forms of violence. The metaphorization, therefore, works in both ways; on the one hand it makes the latent agenda of a national project more obscure due to the displacement of and upon the other, it presents the unquestionable symbols without their contexts at the purview of the critical gaze: similar to what Henri Lefebvre mentions.

34) Ibid., 130.

35) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 68.

36) Ibid., 70.

37) Ibid., 6.

38) Anderson, *Exodus*, 319.

It is an essentially deceptive space, readily occupiable by pretences such as those of civic peace, consensus, or the reign of non-violence. Not that this space – dominating as well as dominated – is not inhabited as well by the agencies of the Law, of the Father, or of Genitality. Logic and logistics conceal its latent violence, which to be effective does not even have to show its hand.³⁹

To follow up the very concept, is it a question worth asking whether the cultural metaphor of the nation-state and national Imagination, due to its displaced context, hinders the process of replacing “structural violence” with “structural peace” or not?

Nation and Violence in Cultural Topology

“Aggressiveness” and its construction and location in any cultural topology is marked by an understanding of the moral principles of what is just and unjust to commit and this dichotomizes action from aggression. In Benjamin’s argument, we find a similar insistence in discovering morality, but it is in relation to the (mis)understanding of natural law, “The meaning of distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate violence is not immediately obvious. The misunderstanding in natural law by which a distinction is drawn between violence used for just ends and violence used for unjust ends must be emphatically rejected.”⁴⁰ Therefore it can be realized that the interpretation of “justness” in accordance with “natural law” is an endless process of cultural shift that is never objectively settled and “New attempts were forever being made to reduce the external to the internal, or the social to the mental, by means of one ingenious topology or another.”⁴¹ The topological structure in this way assigns different values to actions based on different interpretations of morality, which as we previously have discussed, are linked with the hegemonic control of the knowledge producers (i.e., policy makers, think tanks, bureaucrats, or a designated intellectual workforce of a nation or association of nations).⁴² From a purely historical sense, the transition from God or divinity-centric kingdom and later Nations to Modern secularized nation-states has only morphed moralities and judgments to conform the present circumstances and has not overturned the system by any means. Therefore, the state must be identified in continuation of the age-old tradition of having the right to impose morality over its subjects and restrictions over the others as Galtung remarks “Modernity would reject God and Satan but might demand a distinction between Chosen and Unchosen; let us call them Self and Other. Archetype: nationalism, with State as God’s successor.”⁴³ The hegemonic force, as understood through Nietzschean modality of “master-slave morality,” presents us with a remarkably interesting and profound conundrum of violence having “vital spheres of its own.” In Paweł Pieniążek’s essay, the Nietzschean notion of sublimity and violence is understood as “the unmediated power of masters over slaves, and the common use of violence, [that] would lead to the transformation of their [disseminator of ideologies] cultural activity into an ideology of domination.”⁴⁴ The interplay of ethicality, morality, and the ever-relevant question of legitimacy ends up questioning the very tendencies of homogenizing the different types of violence. In Bourdieu’s theory, distinction is a cultural and regulatory trope that predicts and controls the actions and

39) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 358.

40) Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 236.

41) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 407.

42) Benedict Anderson’s critique on the League of Nations is directed at the group’s agenda to market capitalism more prevalent in the cultural spheres of life.

43) Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, 298.

44) Pieniążek, *The Concept of Violence*, 23.

aspirations of those who subscribe to its ideals. But it is also necessary to investigate the topological qualities of the specific cultural taste to devise its own set of logic by making culture a conduit for covert violence.

Topologically, Johan Galtung sees cultural violence in six of these dimensions:⁴⁵ i) religion, ii) politics, iii) language, iv) art, v) empirical science and vi) formal science. Galtung's theory building takes us back to Gandhian dialectics between the "means" and the "ends" and argues the ways with which one can understand the cultural legitimization of violence. In relation to the conscious ideology of the nation (as a concept), "national" symbols can be categorized in these dimensions such as state religions, politics, language, art and forms of knowledge which directly contribute to the creation of a distinct cultural topology that devise different parameters to accept overt forms of violence. To exemplify, we can borrow one of Benjamin's examples of insertion and legitimation of violence, "For the subordination of Citizen to Law... general conscription is a legal end. ... Since Conscription is a case of law-preserving violence that is not in principle distinguished from others, an effective critique is far less easy than the declamation of pacifists and activists suggest."⁴⁶ But conscription is not violence in itself, but preparation for imminent violence anticipated in the near future, the inspiration can be physical threat, nostalgia, or imagined "otherness." The stroking of nostalgia is one such transition from physical to "structural" violence and if we take the example of conscription, we can realize that while it prepares nationals (i.e., Nation's subjects or Human resources) for physical violence, the national culture, mass media, and discourses insert violence in the cultural topology of the nation. In this way a national duty, such as conscription or even voluntary registration, concerned with physical violence is not only limited to those who get selected to perform those roles, but includes all the subjects of the nation as their cultural sphere gets encroached by aggression, war, and legitimate forms of violence. Owing to this, cultural violence becomes a reflection of the physical violence that inculcates subjects with its aggressive ideology, marked by nostalgia and sense of participation for the national cause. Like Benjamin's critique of law where he argues, "the exercise of violence over life and death, more than any other legal act, the law affirms itself."⁴⁷ Culture too, affirms its own existence through manipulating morality, claiming legitimacy for performing violence in national cause. The establishment and promotion of national faith, language, and aesthetic taste always comes at the expense of marginalizing the cultural existence of the "other." The desire to draw the line of "authenticity" between nationally agreed cultures and "other" cultures which are not recognized, in return creates a "secondary" culture that ultimately keeps the national imagination alive, in relation to the peripheral. Through this topology of cultural violence, the consciousness of being national (i.e., national sentiment) is formed. It is in this cultural context, a nation (with all its violent tendencies), forges a lifelong camaraderie between its people as Benedict Anderson epigrammatically remarks, "pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures are dreamed."⁴⁸

The recontextualization attempts made by Gandhi in this regard focuses primarily on the aspects of politics, religion, and language, whose "moral purity" is of paramount importance for his philosophy of non-violence, which ultimately becomes the aesthetic part of culture. Gandhi's insistence of seeing religion in politics and vice-versa changes the very connotations and contexts of "aggression" as well as "peace." This is well reflected in Gandhi's interpretation (or almost transcreation) of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*⁴⁹ where he

45) Ibid., 296.

46) Benjamin, *Critique of Violence*, 236.

47) Ibid., 237.

48) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 154.

49) *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most authentic scriptures of India and Hinduism. It is a part of the Great Hindu Epic Mahabharata. The book has been translated in different languages. Primarily it has thought-provoking ideas on war, violence, justice, life, materialism, and spiritualism. Its role in Indian thought and Political struggle for freedom is invaluable.

allegorizes the scripture following the prevalent ideas propagated by different Theosophical schools in India. Gandhian cultural politics is less concerned with questions of violence or non-violence and more with the fundamentals of morality, “the moral problems which one confronts in this inner war are far more difficult than those of a Physical war.”⁵⁰ In this way the morality discourse dislocates violence in its physical form and questions the complete topology of power through which the covert violence manifests itself. With a spiritual understanding of politics, Gandhi Indianized the language and aesthetics and he did so against an “irreligious”⁵¹ civilization, which was morally corrupting his fellow countrymen. Gandhi’s remark on the language of law and therefore the “nation” proves that he is seeing it as a form of hegemonic repression: “When I become a barrister, I may not speak my mother-tongue and that someone else should have to translate to me from my own language? Is not this absolutely absurd? Is it not a sign of slavery? Am I to blame the English for it or myself? It is we, the English-knowing Indians that have enslaved India. The curse of the nation will rest not upon the English but upon us.”⁵²

The language is seen as a covert manifestation of violence, which has fallen as a “curse” upon the Indian population and the authority given to the English language over Indian (i.e., native) languages. Gandhi’s critique of imperial civilization for its “totalitarian” tendencies have made the teleological discourses centered around means. This way, Gandhi’s critique directed at the “nation” and “civilization” is inherently a critique of its emphasis on creating binary imaginations and passing them as historical facts. But when it comes to Gandhi, it is his ideological interpretation of violence in moral and spiritual context that resists to conform the nation’s limiting ideas of culture and ethics and propounds the concept of “soul-force” instead, which is morally valid since it has no teleological ends like performing labor without any conscious of laboring,⁵³ which does not allow for violence to seek refuge under a cultural ambit.

Gandhism, Nation, and Cultural Peace

*In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love.*⁵⁴

– Benedict Anderson

The obscurity of the concept of peace stands on an equal footing with its antonymic peer, violence, which in a dialectical process determines each other’s relevance. Galtung, in this respect, presents a simple yet provocative idea regarding peace-making and its pragmatic aspects, “The opposite of cultural violence would be ‘cultural peace,’ meaning aspects of a culture that serve to justify and legitimize direct peace and structural peace. If many and diverse aspects of that kind are found in a culture, we can refer to it as a ‘peace culture.’”⁵⁵ The Gandhian practice of *Satyagraha* (derived from Sanskrit root words of “Sat-Yah-Grah-Aha” understood as “clinging to truth”) is an embodiment of “cultural peace” itself as without the environment conducive for peace no peace

50) Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

51) Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 39.

52) *Ibid.*, 79.

53) Kapila, *Political Thought in Action*, 135.

54) Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 141.

55) Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, 302.

discourse can begin. Gandhi's *Satyagraha* was inherently against the environment that he faced, where he saw corruption and venality as an inseparable part of politics with which he was dealing, and his spiritualization efforts on contemporary politics became the way to immunize his fellow comrades (i.e., *Satyagrahis*) against the moral corruption.⁵⁶ For Gandhi, this moral corruption translates into the violence in the cultural structure as he understood the existence of "structural violence" in contemporary Indian politics which was dominated by extremist thoughts.⁵⁷ Gandhi's concept of *Swaraj* was marked by "*Nishkam Karma*,"⁵⁸ or the action without the attachment, and in relation to this his peace was not a contradictory idea, which has a negative connotation that forms a binary opposition to any form of violence. This exclusionary trope itself sustains "structural violence," but Gandhian *Satyagraha* is a way of life and conceptually needs nothing to either legitimize or get legitimation from. The example takes us back to the basic-most Gandhian idea which says "take care of the means and the ends will take care of themselves."⁵⁹ Galtung touches upon something similar when he remarks, "any justification derived from the hard core of a culture, (e.g., a calling as a Chosen People) would be rejected when it conflicted with this even higher, even 'harder' axiom."⁶⁰ The realization of the banality of end-centric discourses regarding peace is one way of conceptualizing the alternative of violence in cultural topology.

When we explore the dimensions of "peace" in a nation's (conceptual) ideology, we come across the same moral discourses that have permeated our discussions. The set parameters of the morality are therefore equally applicable to peace discourses and it has been a noted tendency of the state apparatus to masquerade the absence of violence as peace that Lefebvre brings to light, "it does not merely express power – it proceeds to repress in the name of power."⁶¹ This way, the nation exercises its hegemonic power to propagate peace in relation to an absence of war or armed conflict in our daily lives and discourses. This way, nation's imagination boils down peace as merely an end, which allows them see violence of different nature as legitimate means and therefore attaches a "moral justness"⁶² to it. It is an age-old concept that dates back to Middle Ages and can be best understood in Augustine of Hippo's⁶³ arguments: "They who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with His laws, have represented in their persons the public justice or the wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'."⁶⁴

The moral and spiritual legitimacy constitute the core of the nationalist project and through these mediums "structural violence" is formed that kindles any nationalist imagination. The establishment of "structural peace"

56) Ibid., 301.

57) Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 56 (Maintaining moral purity while indulging in politics and Civilizational structure is implied here).

58) "*Nishkam Karma*" is one of the major principles propagated in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* that advocates for working without any desires for the result. Gandhi took inspiration from these ideas in developing his "Unity of Means-and-Ends" concept.

59) Gandhi, *Harijan*, 8.

60) Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, 302.

61) Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 358.

62) Non-violence in the conceptual plane, for example, can semantically oppose violence and its existence is purely teleological as its morphological construction is based on "violence" itself.

63) The principles of a "Just War" originated with classical Greek and Roman philosophers like Plato and Cicero and were added to by Christian theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Although St. Augustine provided comments on the morality of war from the Christian perspective (railing against the love of violence that war can engender) as did several Arabic commentators in the intellectual flourishing from the ninth to twelfth centuries, but the most systematic exposition in the Western tradition, and one that still attracts attention, was outlined by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. In the '*Summa Theologicae*,' Aquinas presents the general outline of what becomes the traditional just war theory as discussed in modern universities. He discusses not only the justification of war but also the kinds of activity that are permissible (for a Christian) in war (see below).

64) Augustine, *City of God*.

in the discussed context poses an existential threat to national imagination and its divine, moral, and intellectual rights of committing “just” violence. The ambiguous sense of morality is also present in other religious and spiritual texts, including *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, but it is the interpretation and inference that culturally establishes any form of meaning. Therefore, Gandhi’s recontextualization of cultural forms of “violence” and “peace” is not limited to the subversion of predominant notions of his time but protrudes as far as defining the moral space of actions, which ultimately provides an appropriate environment for violence to thrive.

Way Forward

Upon presenting arguments and explaining modalities of varied types of violence and peace, it is fair to say that historically both terms have been grossly generalized. The article stresses on understanding these notions pertaining to their contested nature and contexts. The topological arrangement of logic to substantiate overt or covert forms of violence raises questions on the “justness” of it. It is fair to say that fanning totalitarian ideas and strong nationalistic urges became a shared phenomenon across the globe. The urge to carve out an identity for the “self” and subjugate the imagined “other” is overtly visible in recent geopolitical upheavals, from the conflicts in Ukraine and Afghanistan to national emergencies being declared in Sri Lanka and Myanmar and many such instances, which has caused mass exodus, displacement, effacement of culture, material wealth and most importantly identities. But any simplistic resolution would do a great disservice to the dynamics of the cultural violence as a concept and therefore, it is essential to ponder on the reactive qualities of violence, which is born out of necessity to secure cultural identity in a binary formation. Often these formations end up establishing an imaginary opponent, where historicity is forgotten and only the symbolic projection remains. Through Gandhian philosophy, the argument can be built on addressing and countering covert forms of violence and oppression in face of any rambunctious and physical onslaught that could bring potent change to the traditional hierarchies of power. In other words, the alternative forms of resistance can be imagined by not necessarily conforming to the national imagination and segregation of geographies, but by acknowledging the existence of logical and material space beyond this dyad. Thus, national symbols, codes and the whole culture must be consolidated, neither by turning “chance into destiny” nor by an ephemeral and emotionally charged response, but by reflecting organic, inclusive, and “profoundly self-sacrificing love.”

Here, the phrase “profoundly self-sacrificing love” is borrowed from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* for its resemblance and replication with Gandhian ideals of nation and is less concerned with the physical sacrifices and more with the symbolic ones. The resistance of Ukraine has garnered worldwide sympathy, solidarity, and assistance and the bulk of it has been achieved through acceptance of Ukraine’s national symbols (i.e., the Ukrainian national flag, coat of arms, national salute: ‘*Slava Ukraini*,’ etc.), into the socio-cultural sphere of the globe. Different nations, nationals, and subcultures of the world (predominantly through popular culture and social media) have carved national symbols of Ukraine beyond its geographical limitations, thus creating a heterogeneous identity for mass consumption. The study is rooted in the process of recontextualization of national imagination and accordingly Ukrainian conflict has shown us the life of national imageries transpiring into an inclusive and transnational context, where a geographically distanced person can also subscribe and conform to Ukraine’s national and cultural markers. The philosophy of Gandhi pertaining to nation deals with sacrifice of this exclusive identity (i.e., firm and centralized nationality) and Ukrainian resistance has shown us that it is very much possible to establish national culture and ancillary symbols based on an inclusive kind of nationalism, which will not espouse any dyadic “otherness” (it is fascinating to note that Ukraine has not made this resistance ‘Anti-Russian’ so far, either materially or symbolically), and thus will not inflict the cycle of structural violence. The existence, interoperability, and cultural exchange between

the symbols of different nations and cultures pose an interesting proposition before us that if national identities cannot be forgotten in our contemporary world, then they must be recontextualized to the point that a nation's symbols and identity are not an exclusive ornamentation, but a window for cultural reciprocation and peacebuilding. The same can be applied as a modality to combat other such crises that are facing a risk of effacement, either from external or internal causes, where the recontextualization of symbols and positing the local cultural markers in the global context could be the way forward.

Here, the examples of the present-day conflict are brought to critically place the study among the thorny questions of present-day politics and the crises. This synthesis evinces the relevance of having diverse perspectives on violence and peace, in context of their application in national imagination, which makes research works fundamental as well as problem-oriented at once. The violence at present is of no less relevance than those committed in different periods of history, as culture and nostalgia rekindle past and links history with present, with a hope for creating a future. It is up to the thinkers of our age to question the existence and legitimacy of any such "structural violence" and imagine a world beyond these violent tendencies.

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