

## **From Negative to Positive Peace: Meeting of Two Seminal Minds**

*Dr. Sumit Mukerji,<sup>1</sup> Professor, Department of Political Science  
University of Kalyani West Bengal India*

### **Abstract**

In the history of emergence, evolution and progress of Conflict and Peace studies as an academic discipline along with the enormous proliferation of literature on the subject, one path breaking milestone has been the concept of Positive peace as an alternative to Negative Peace. Articulated by Johan Galtung, it provided a counterblast to the conceptual predominance of Negative Peace over the concerned domain. Galtung posited Positive Peace as an emancipatory concept based on structural integration which promised true, lasting and sustainable peace as opposed to the fragile and uncertain temporary reprieve provided by Negative Peace characterized by an undercurrent of violence. Philosophically, Positive peace aims not so much at conflict resolution but rather the establishment of peace animated by the vision of world order based on the sanctity of international law. Unlike its counterpart where there is peace without justice, Positive peace emphasizes on social equality and justice, interconnectedness of life, harmony, renewed human bonds and shared human values. While Galtung's work has been subjected to searching analysis and criticism, the role of a seminal Indian mind in the process of theoretical development of his ideas, deserves in-depth and meticulous examination. This was Mahatma Gandhi who influenced, inspired and ignited the mind of Galtung who in turn internalized his message and interpolated and integrated it into his framework of analysis.

Galtung labelled Gandhi a Structuralist who distinguished between the person and structure. Through Gandhian lens, Galtung saw how violence was built into social structures rather than persons. He adapted the Gandhian distinction between direct and indirect violence the latter categorized as structural and cultural violence which was no less venomous and hurtful than direct violence. Disempowered and marginalized people suffer and die in silence due to structured inequalities which have the potential to ignite armed conflict when the chronically oppressed resort to armed violence. Ethnic conflicts in particular, are exacerbated by continued disparities and deprivations. Gandhi intuitively understood the violence perpetrated by oppressive social structures and political institutions and was unequivocal in his

---

<sup>1</sup> [sumitmou@rediffmail.com](mailto:sumitmou@rediffmail.com)

affirmation that the evil lay in the structure, not in the person carrying out his obligations. His emphasis was on system generated structural violence rather than actor oriented direct violence. The essence of non-violence is to root out antagonism, not the antagonists themselves.

**Keywords** (5-6 words)

M. K. Gandhi, Johan Galtung, Thomas Weber, Conflict resolution, Non-violence

In the history of evolution of Peace Studies, the contribution of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the generalissimo of India's freedom struggle and the exponent of the idea of non-violence, and Johan Galtung, the proponent of the concept of Positive Peace, is of portentous significance. Though they never met in person, yet they shared a remarkable intellectual and spiritual rapport. Galtung derived much of the essence of his concept of Positive peace from Gandhi and incorporated Gandhian ideas in his framework of analysis without being blindly imitative or derivative. He enriched Peace Studies with his novel idea of Positive Peace and Gandhi studies with his rediscovery of Gandhi in the Peace Paradigm formulated by him thereby building an enduring bridge between the two.

The present paper intends to rediscover the Gandhi- Galtung interface where Gandhi was the invisible catalyst behind Galtung's ingenious value addition to Peace and Conflict Studies, an area which has remained an un-ploughed field of research till date.

Johan Galtung is accredited with the articulation of the concept of Positive Peace as a counterblast to the idea of Negative Peace which had hitherto dominated theoretical discourse on Peace Studies. It was a path breaking contribution of Galtung to the discipline because without it, the idea of Negative Peace would have become central to Peace Research. The Positive Peace Paradigm which he postulated in his seminal essay (Galtung, 1969) was inspired by the vision of bringing about peace rather than resolving conflict through political mechanisms. His forceful counterpoint to the concept of Negative Peace was that, if definition of Peace, is the absence of violence, then any viable discussion of peace hinges on a definition of violence. It was here that Galtung distinguished between Positive and Negative Peace on the basis of a distinction between direct and indirect violence. In this reconceptualization of Peace, he was decisively influenced and inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was one of the shining apostles of Peace and thus Peace Research has been characterized by perceptible Gandhian underpinnings. The present paper endeavors to

explore the extent of the influence of Gandhi on Galtung and also address the research gap in Peace Research namely the scarcely discussed issue of the link between Gandhian social philosophy and conflict resolution literature represented by Galtung and his likes. The modern problem-solving win-win approach as opposed to the erstwhile zero-sum approach, is strikingly akin to Gandhi and at the bipolar end of the spectrum of mainstream techniques of conflict resolution where solution of immediate problems is prioritized. Positive Peace aims at societal transformation as the ultimate goal which gives it a distinct Gandhian flavor. It may be argued that similarities of thought are often coincidental and should not be stretched too far because farfetched extrapolations do not benefit serious discourse. However, since Galtung himself has averred that Gandhi shaped his mind and thought, therefore it would be worthwhile to explore the presence of Gandhi in Galtung's ingenious construction of the Positive Peace Discourse. Gandhi was undoubtedly a votary of Positive Peace in practice though not specifically in the theoretical literature of peace research. Unlike Galtung, Gandhi made no theoretical contribution to peace research and yet Galtung acknowledges that 'We can always learn enormously from Gandhi, but not if we accept him uncritically.' (Galtung 1992, 96) It is correctly said that Gandhi 'cared little for grand theorizing and never attempted to organize his thoughts into a coherent philosophical whole.' (Brown, 1989, 392) David Cortright is partially correct when he says that 'Gandhi was more a doer than a thinker.' (Cortright, 2007, 19) Gandhi was a thinker no doubt, but not a theorist. He himself testified that 'I am not built for academic writings; Action is my domain.' (Galtung, 1992, 42). Paradoxically however, he made a deep dent in the mind of an eminent peace research theorist Johan Galtung without being a theorist himself.

### **A. The Dichotomy of Peace**

The concept of Negative Peace which had exercised its hegemony over the domain of peace research for a long time, essentially means the absence of visible, direct violence. It is pessimistic and curative and not always achieved by peaceful means. It is peace without justice through which, the people are lulled into a false sense of peace at the cost of justice. Thus, there is a surreptitious undercurrent of tension simmering under the surface as there is no lasting reconciliation of conflict and there can be recrudescence of violence any time in future. Negative Peace simply seeks to control, contain and reduce actual and potential violence thereby reducing the incidence of war by eliminating extreme dangers of the war system through strategic deterrence, arms control, etc. by addressing the immediate symptoms. Positive Peace as visualized by Galtung, is an Emancipatory concept based on

structural integration. It is optimistic in orientation and seeks peace that is truly lasting and sustainable through peaceful means. It emphasizes on the world order by upholding international law and urging compliance with multilateral treaties, use of international courts, nonviolent resolution of disputes, participation in international organizations, trade and communications, establishing social equality and justice, economic equity, ecological balance, protection of citizens from attack and meeting basic human needs. It champions the interconnectedness of life, tranquility, harmony, strengthened human bonds and shared human values. Positive Peace also encompasses indirect violence exemplified by structural ingredients like poverty, hunger, discrimination etc. which are no less potent than direct violence perpetrated through physical assault, verbal attacks, acts of murder, rape, torture and the like. Indirect violence is that which does not hurt or kill through fists or guns but through social structures that produce poverty, death and enormous suffering. Structural violence can be politically repressive and exploitative. It occurs when the social order directly or indirectly causes human suffering and death. Episodes of structural violence are less perceptible as they are embedded in the exploitative structures producing hunger and illness. Disempowered and marginalized people suffer and die in silence due to structured inequalities, local, regional and global. Such inequalities can ignite organized armed conflict as the chronically oppressed resort to direct violence. Ethnic conflicts for example, are exacerbated by continued disparities and divisions. In this connection, the factor of cultural violence assumes added significance. It consists of ideologies, convictions, traditions and systems of legitimation through which direct and structural violence are justified. Structural inequalities become part of the cultural mechanism which legitimizes the continuation of subtle violence. Ideologies are constructed to carry on structural inequalities in a routine manner. Galtung's re conceptualization of peace on this broad and expansive canvas, derived much of its content from Gandhi.

### **B. Gandhi in the Life and Thought of Galtung: The Enduring Presence**

Galtung has himself acknowledged that when Gandhi was murdered by Nathuram Godse, he was a 17-year-old boy at Norway and he cried much to his 'puzzlement and dismay' as he revealed in an interviewed to Henrik Urdal. It is however not correct that he cried without knowing who Gandhi was. He says that it was in 1948 when he discovered Gandhi. 'I knew about him before then of course. I kept myself informed like any bright teenager. But I had no idea he affected me so deeply that I would cry when he was shot. I emerged from the war with a palpable distaste for war ... the war was over and Gandhi's message was there as an

alternative.’ (Urdal 2019). Galtung’s father led the resistance against the Nazis and was imprisoned in a concentration camp at Girni but survived the ordeal. This left a lasting impact on Galtung’s mind and at this juncture, he found in Gandhi, a source of pabulum and solace. Ashish Nandy, the noted scholar, made him aware why the court proceedings against Godse were kept secret because he had argued in his defense that Gandhi stood in the way of modern India based on industrialization, urbanization, strong army etc. Galtung explored Gandhian philosophy in the Gandhian Institute of Studies in Varanasi in 1969 and it was here that he learned the basics of structural violence and labelled Gandhi as a Structuralist who postulated Positive non-violence which aimed at making the antagonist start being peaceful. Negative non-violence was exemplified by techniques like non-Cooperation and civil Disobedience. Interestingly, these techniques were widely employed by Gandhi in his struggle against British imperialism. Thus, here Galtung tacitly criticizes Gandhi probably because these techniques were suited for the immediate objective of fighting British rule but were inappropriate for the larger vision of World Peace. Here Galtung took a broader view of Gandhian philosophy and reinvented Gandhi to interpolate him into his ingenious paradigm of peace. His creative re interpretation of Gandhi enhanced Gandhi’s stature in the domain of Peace Research.

### **C. A Tie of the Strongest ring**

Gandhi and Galtung never met in person however, Galtung was a teenager at the time of Gandhi’s death. Thus, while it is certainly possible for Galtung to be influenced by Gandhi, it is apparently absurd to put it the other way round. However, it is perfectly logical to say that Gandhi was the precursor of Galtung whose enunciation of the idea of Positive Peace, had a distinctly Gandhian flavor. In a sense, Galtung recreated Gandhi by providing a theoretical framework for his axioms, something Gandhi had never done. This enhanced the theoretical credibility and validity of Gandhi’s ideas in the field of Peace Research. Had Gandhi survived to see Galtung’s work on Peace, he would have surely re discovered himself in it and felt elated to find in Galtung the embodiment of the principles that formed the crux of Gandhian philosophy.

Gandhi intuitively understood the violence perpetrated by oppressive social structures and political institutions. He was unequivocal in his affirmation that the evil lay in the structure, not the person carrying out his obligations. The essence of non-violence is to extirpate antagonism, not the antagonists themselves. Colonialism is an ideal example of structural violence. Evil is an offshoot of the social structure. Economics that is destructive of the moral

well being of the individual or nation, is essentially immoral. Political structure, bereft of religion and morality, cannot bring about, inner freedom, dignity and justice. He denounced Capitalism but not the capitalists. He hated racialism but not the white men. He was of the decided view that sheer replacement of colonial white regime, will not bring succor to suffering masses. Modern western civilization is based on ruthless competition and unbridled individualism. Unregulated quest for consumerism would divide the society and inflict psychological damage on the underprivileged. Gandhi wanted to demolish norms and institutions that justified discrimination, exploitation and dehumanization. Gandhi's emphasis was on system generated structural violence rather than actor oriented direct violence. Untouchability was a blatant cause of structural violence. Gandhi did not visualize the modern territorial state as the panacea for structural violence. His non-violent activism was based on the conception of a social order where there was no de humanization and each was treated with dignity in the spirit of shared humanity. In his ideal society free from structural violence, people would be content to fulfil basic human needs and not hanker for more. Colonialism not only engages in political and economic exploitation but fabricates a cultural mindset conducive to the subjugation of targets. Unless there is a total shift in the way we look at the concepts of progress and development, India will witness greater intensity of structural and cultural violence. Concepts of Swaraj and Swadeshi were meant to liberate the people from systemic violence. Structural violence was ingrained in the capitalist world. Non- violent social order would limit consumption as well as new technology which promoted exploitation, inequity, centralization of power and authority which were anathema to Gandhi.

Galtung believed that structural and direct violence are independent as exemplified by family and gender violence, hate crimes, racial violence, police violence, state violence, terrorism and war. Structural violence is closely related to social injustice. Galtung perceived it as an avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs. It was different from classical violence in that it had no particular starting point or identifiable actor. It signified the deprivation of human rights, damage to psyche and mind, poverty that was structurally conditioned and also structurally conditioned alienation and both repressive intolerance and repressive tolerance that is to say tolerance compatible with repression. (Galtung 1969, 167-171) Galtung refers to latent violence in Europe which might erupt into nuclear war, but the manifest structural violence in the two Americas already caused an annual toll of nuclear magnitudes. (Galtung 1969, 190). Galtung did not neglect the structural components of the

European situation that is the exploitation of East Europe by the west and was equally prolific about the high level of personal violence in the two Americas. His view was that peace research in Europe should focus on personal violence and its counterpart in the Americas should emphasize structural violence. Galtung's theoretical postulation of an extended conception of peace, led him to the visualization of peace with two sides, absence of personal and structural violence which meant Negative and Positive Peace respectively. Absence of personal violence, does not refer to a positively defined condition but in contrast, absence of structural violence implying social justice, is a positively defined condition signifying egalitarian distribution of power and resources. Peace conceived in this way, is not only a matter of control and reduction of the overt use of violence, but also vertical development. Peace theory is intimately related to conflict theory but equally with Development theory. Peace research defined as research into the conditions, past, present and future, will be equally connected with conflict research and development research, the former relevant for negative and the former for positive peace. Negative peace is constant while positive peace is constantly changing. Galtung says that there is a tendency to focus on negative peace because of consensus that is readily obtained and stresses the need to reveal and explore the subtle mechanisms of structural violence. (Galtung 1989, 13-33). It is here that Galtung shares with Gandhi, a tie of the strongest ring and incorporates much of Gandhian Structuralism into his ingenious framework of analysis.

#### **D. Third Party intervention. The Peripheral Intersectionality of the Gandhi- Galtung Interface**

While the primary point of convergence for Galtung and Gandhi, was the idea of structural violence, there was another peripheral area of intersection of ideas that is Third Party intervention. Galtung postulated the theory of the 'Great Chain of Non-violence' to explain how third-party involvement brings about social change. (Galtung 1989, 25). From the perspective of Physics, he argues that for a physical object to move another, it must act on it in proximate space and time through an intervening field in which energy is transmitted. The force of non-violence is similar. It has to be applied directly or from group to group until it reaches its intended target, the decision-making elite. Non-violent pressure is transmitted not through spatial distance but social distance. The shorter that distance, the more effective the action. Political change thus depends on closing the social space between victim and oppressor, which can be accomplished through the effective action of intermediary groups that support the victimized population.' (Cortright, 2007, 134-135). Galtung says that

political change does not result from the resistance to the oppressed themselves but from the action of others who intervene on their behalf. Such intervening groups play a vital role in ending systems of oppression. Change is created for them, on behalf of them but not primarily by them. Cortright criticizes Galtung for such an overstatement which discounts the value of direct resistance struggles. His counter point is that 'In most examples of progressive change, the oppressed themselves are primarily responsible for their own liberation.' (Cortright, 2007, 135). He cites the examples of the US Civil Rights movement, the freedom struggle of South Africa etc. where social change was brought about by effective social action of the oppressed people. In all the cases, third parties and intervening groups supported the struggle for justice but the decisive factor was the action of the oppressed populace. In fact, it was their strategy and sacrifice which attracted third party involvement. Cortright here raises the important point as to whether the role of the third party should be recognized as catalytic or instrumental. Experience would tilt the balance in favor of the latter but Cortright himself acknowledges the contribution of Galtung in identifying the important role of third parties in assisting the process of social change. (Cortright, 2007, 135). He adds that 'Third Party intervention is especially important in closing the social space between oppressors and their victims. It helps to overcome the psychological mechanisms that oppressors use to justify their exploitative policies.' (Cortright, 2007, 136). It is a fact that in many cases oppressors dehumanize their victims. The racists of South America called the Blacks subhuman. During the Vietnam war, soldiers called the Vietnamese Gooks. Oppressors as a rule, view their victims as objects, not subjects. They are obsessed with a superiority complex and maintain social distance from the oppressed. This distance begins to narrow down when Third Party intervention takes place and then the victims no longer feel as isolated and vulnerable as they were earlier. One reason is that third party interveners belong to the same social milieu as the oppressed class. The white student activists, clergy and others who participated on the civil rights movement, fundamentally changed the social dynamics of the struggle. The struggle thus no longer remained as one between white and black and the oppressors could not disdainfully dismiss the opposition as the 'other.' Now it included the element of selfhood. Intervention by intermediary groups helped transmit the pressure of social resistance directly to the oppressor. It may thus be concluded that the power of non-violence is enhanced when third parties join the struggle on behalf of those who are fighting for justice.



Cortright here makes a perspicacious point that third party intervention bridges the apparent gap between the spiritual emphasis of Gandhi and the plea of Barbara Deming for more assertive forms of non-violence. In her seminal essay ‘On Revolution and Equilibrium’, Deming offered an eloquent defense of the Gandhian method and passionately advocated forceful but still non-violent patterns of resistance. She transformed and modernized the Gandhian method by systematically rationalizing non-violent action that rested entirely on pragmatic rather than religious foundations. She stretched the limits of non-violence to mold it into a militant and revolutionary form of social change. It was her reasoned conviction that non-violent protest was not based only on prayer, persuasion and moral appeal. It has to be a form of coercion and power. ‘To resort to power, one need not be violent, and to speak to conscience one need not be meek. The most effective action both resorts to power and engages conscience.’ (Deming, 1968) Cortright says that one need not assume like Gandhi that all humans will respond to generosity and appeals of modernity. Even in case of hearts that are too cold to melt, non-violent can still be effective. ‘We don’t have to win the heart of every adversary; we can go over or around the opponent to win the sympathy of his or her allies and potential supporters. Even if the adversary remains unmoved personally, non-violent action can appeal to the hearts of those on whom, the exercise of power depends. It can alter public sympathies and erode an opponent’s power base thereby generating pressure for a change of policy. The effectiveness of non-violent action thus becomes less a question of moral persuasion and more a matter of influencing third party opinion and undermining the adversary’s legitimacy and public support.’ (Cortright, 2007, 136). Here, Deming emancipates non-violence from religious overtones and imparts to it, a pragmatic dimension where the objective is to divide the loyalties of the opponent without being Machiavellian in the conventional sense. Since Machiavellianism was ideologically repugnant to Gandhi who exalted means over ends, thus it would be far fetched to extrapolate the former into the Gandhian framework, but Deming’s emphasis on tactics and strategy may be characterized as pragmatic rather than philosophical where sagacity rather than expediency was the hallmark.

Gandhi had his own idea of Third-Party intervention which was reflected in his visualization of the *Shanti Sena* as a non-violent volunteer peace-keeping force dedicated to minimize communal violence within the Indian populace. He wanted to demonstrate through it, the viability of unarmed peace-keeping and an expert on the subject has drawn a parallel between the *Shanti Sena* and the complex situation of today’s UN. (Weber, 1996, 2009).

From the available source material, it is known that Gandhi first conceived the idea of a non-violent army of soldiers during the Second World War which he wanted to use to defend India non-violently in the eventuality of Japanese intrusion. However, from the testimony of Narayan Desai, the son of Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's Chief Secretary, it is known that the idea originated in his mind as far back as 1922. Thereafter, in the wake of partition of India in 1947, he wanted to organize nationwide *Shanti Sena* in response to the communal holocaust which witnessed the slaughter of half a million people and 10 million people forced to leave their home. The Conference scheduled in 1948, where this idea was to be given a concrete shape, never saw the light of the day as Gandhi himself was killed. However, his spiritual successor Vinoba Bhave founded the *Shanti Sena* in 1957 consisting of Gandhian development workers from rural areas. The story of their meaningful intervention in communal riots constitutes a glorious saga in the history of peace activism in India (Shepard, 1987). Jayaprakash Narayan also organized a Peace Army but that was for political motivations. Vinoba Bhave was undoubtedly the initiator of *Shanti Sena* in the practical realm. This is not however central to the Gandhi-Galtung interface but its peripheral relevance cannot be overlooked.

#### **E. The Paradox of Invisibility**

Gandhi was an invisible molder of the mind of Galtung and the reflection of the invisible was most visible in Galtung's tryst with Peace and non-violence. The mission of his life, was permeated with the spirit of Gandhi at every point. The Transcend International founded by Galtung is a global network dedicated to bringing about a more equitable and less violent world through conflict transformation and mediation. He himself has been invited to mediate in more than 150 conflicts. He has followed three specific steps for conflict resolution. In the first place, Galtung has gone for dialogue with all parties separately. Exploring their goals and fears and earning their confidence. Secondly, he has distinguished between legitimate goals which affirm needs and illegitimate goals that violate the same. He has been categorical on the point that self-determination is legitimate and ruling over others is not. Finally, He has devoted himself to the task of bridging the gap between all legitimate but seemingly contradictory goals through solutions embodying creativity, empathy and non-violence building a new reality. It was Galtung who resolved the conflict between Denmark and the Muslim world regarding a cartoon on Prophet Mohammed. The Danish Prime Minister refused to have a Dialogue on how to balance the right to freedom of expression with the right not to be insulted. Galtung was able to transcend this intransigence through the power of

Dialogue and here his approach was unmistakably Gandhian though he did not explicitly refer to him. Significantly, Galtung owed his mindset largely to Gandhi and Gandhi was most visible in him as an invisible propellant of inspiration where he did not make any direct allusion to him. It is not known whether Galtung in the heart of his hearts, felt that he was paying tributes to his inspirer when he embarked on his mission of conflict resolution, but the irrefutable fact remains that what is apparently invisible, is actually most resplendently visible as is the case of Gandhi's presence in Galtung's life and work. One has to pierce the veil of the invisible to perceive the visible. Any comparative analysis of Gandhi and Galtung must recognize and negotiate this Paradox of Invisibility which cannot fail to excite, stimulate and fascinate scholars and researchers seeking to explore the points of complementarity between the two apostles of peace in a world where conflicts are still waged with diabolical ferocity. Whether or not the Galtung- Gandhi duo will dominate Peace Studies in the modern world, is for the future to tell.

### **Bibliography:**

#### **Articles:**

Deming Barbara, (1968). On Revolution and Equilibrium. *Liberation*, February, 203-204.

Galtung Johan, (1969). Violence, Peace and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6, 3.

Urdal Henrik (2019). Inspiration from a father: Johan Galtung. <https://blogs.prio.org/2019/05/inspiration-from-a-father-johan-galtung-interviewed-by-henrik-urdal/>

#### **Books:**

Brown Judith, (1989). *Gandhi, The Prisoner of Hope*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Cortright David, (2007). *Gandhi and Beyond, Non-violence for an Age of Terrorism*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited.

Galtung Johan, (1989). *Non-violence and Israel/Palestine*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Galtung Johan, (1992). *The way is the Goal, Gandhi Today*. Ahmedabad, India: Gujarat Vidyapith.

Shepard Mark, (1987). *Gandhi Today*. Arcata, California: A Report on Mahatma Gandhi's successors, Simple Productions.

Weber Thomas (1996). *Gandhi's Peace Army: The Shanti Sen and Unarmed Peace- Keeping*. NY: Syracuse University Press.

Weber Thomas, (2009). *The Shanti Sena, Philosophy, History and Action*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan.

**Separate Chapters:**

Galtung Johan, (1989) *Principles of Non-violence: The Great Chain of Non-violence Hypothesis*. In *Non-violence and Israel/Palestine*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.